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# Security Council

Seventy-third year

*Provisional*

**8331**st meeting

Monday, 27 August 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

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| *President*: | Ms. Pierce | (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) |
| *Members*: | Bolivia (Plurinational State of) | Mrs. Cordova Soria |
| | China | Mr. Lie Cheng |
| | Côte d'Ivoire | Mr. Adom |
| | Equatorial Guinea | Mr. Esono Mbengono |
| | Ethiopia | Ms. Guadey |
| | France | Mrs. Gueguen |
| | Kazakhstan | Mr. Umarov |
| | Kuwait | Mr. Alotaibi |
| | Netherlands | Mr. Van Oosterom |
| | Peru | Mr. Meza-Cuadra |
| | Poland | Ms. Wronecka |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Volgarev |
| | Sweden | Mr. Orrenius Skau |
| | United States of America | Mrs. Haley |

## Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Letter dated 7 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/762)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

**Letter dated 7 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/762)**

**The President**: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Monseigneur Marcel Utembi, President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo; and Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha, spokesperson for Rien Sans Les Femmes.

Ms. Zerrougui and Ms. Furaha join today's meeting via video-teleconference from Kinshasa and Monseigneur Utembi joins it via video-teleconference from Kisangani.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/762, which contains a letter dated 7 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I would like to remind our briefers that while we are delighted to hear from them today, we would be very grateful if they could keep to the given time limits.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

**Ms. Zerrougui** (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Security Council for affording me the opportunity to brief it on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly the latest developments in the electoral process under way in the country.

As I have already reported to the Council (see S/PV.8318), while preparations are ongoing for the upcoming presidential and national and provincial legislative elections, tangible progress has been seen in adhering to the critical stages of the calendar of the Independent National Electoral Commission. All political parties and groupings of the Majorité présidentielle and the opposition have put forward candidates for the three ballots within the timetable foreseen by the calendar, which is an important step towards holding the elections on 23 December. That phase of filing candidacies for the presidential and legislative elections has been marked by several events that warrant underlining.

First, President Kabila Kabange honoured his commitment not to stand for a third term. Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary was nominated as the sole candidate of the Majorité présidentielle under the banner of the Front commun pour le Congo.

Secondly, the President of the Ensemble pour le changement platform, Moïse Katumbi, was not able to submit his candidacy as he wished, since he was not able to return to the Democratic Republic of the Congo before the deadline of 8 August. Various reactions followed, ranging from the request by Mr. Katumbi's lawyers that the issue be referred to the Conseil d'État to the demand by opposition leaders, the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo and the President of the Senate for his candidacy to be allowed to go forward.

Thirdly, according to the provisional list published by the Independent National Electoral Commission on 24 August, six of the 25 candidates for the presidential election were disqualified on various grounds, including the loss of nationality of origin, conflict of interest and a conviction for witness interference. They are Senator Jean-Pierre Bemba, three former prime ministers — Adolphe Muzito, Antoine Gizenga and Samy Badibanga — as well as Jean-Paul Moka-Ngolo and Marie Josée Ifoku.

Finally, it should be noted that, despite criteria within the revised electoral law that are deemed to be more restrictive, a large number of candidacies were registered. According to the final list submitted by the Independent National Electoral Commission, 19,640 candidates were registered for the provincial elections, while the provisional lists show 19 candidates for the presidential election and 15,222 candidates declared

admissible out of the 15,505 candidates for the national legislative elections.

The proportion of women candidacies has not changed since 2011, remaining at approximately 12 per cent of the total, or 2,318 for the provincial elections, 1,784 for the national legislative elections and none for the presidential election following the disqualification by the Independent National Electoral Commission of the only woman candidate.

In accordance with its mandate, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) continues to provide technical assistance to the Independent National Electoral Commission in the organization of elections. The Mission also stands ready to provide logistical support to the process, should the Commission request it. As I have informed the Council in previous statements, the Independent National Electoral Commission and the Congolese authorities have repeatedly indicated that such logistical support would not be sought and that the Democratic Republic of the Congo wished to organize its elections without external logistical or financial support.

Despite the progress made and the assurances of the Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission that elections will be held on 23 December, the period ahead will be marked by challenges and intense political consultations. The publication of the provisional list of candidates for the presidential and legislative elections has raised challenges and questions within the Congolese political class and society. The Independent National Electoral Commission is accused of having overstepped its boundaries by excluding candidates on the basis of interpretations of electoral law, which, according to those concerned, falls within the exclusive competence of the Constitutional Court. The contestation process is under way and the final lists of candidates are expected to be published on 19 September after appeals are considered by the Constitutional Court.

The lack of consensus on the use of voting machines and the failure to publish the final list of voters also remain two areas of major contention among the various stakeholders. I can only encourage those stakeholders to build on the constructive approach they took during the nomination period in order to pursue dialogue on those issues and resolve their differences. Of course, I remain determined to continue using my good offices to find solutions that build the confidence necessary for peaceful and inclusive elections.

(*spoke in English*)

The perceived credibility of the electoral process remains a key concern. The ongoing process of review and contestation, in particular of presidential candidates, by the Constitutional Court will be key to the legitimacy of the electoral process going forward. A lack of confidence or a perceived lack of credibility in the Independent National Electoral Commission or in the decisions of the Constitutional Court would serve only to heighten tensions in the process. Any impression that the Independent National Electoral Commission may have gone beyond its remit in the interpretation of the electoral law in determining the eligibility of candidates to stand in the elections would only undermine confidence in the process as a whole. It is hoped that the decisions of the Constitutional Court will help to resolve any ambiguities and instil confidence. The scrupulous applicability of the Constitution and electoral law is therefore key to moving forward.

The meaningful inclusion of a greater number of women in the electoral process is a priority if the spirit of resolution 1325 (2000) is to find meaning in the current political context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and if women are to play a role in the newly elected Government and legislatures, which resolution 1325 (2000) foresees. In that regard, supporting women candidates who will run in the elections and ensuring that women can vote freely and safely on election day is key.

The continued instances of targeted repression and intimidation of political activists and human rights defenders in certain provinces, as well as other restrictions on political space, do not instil confidence. Therefore, I continue to call for the lifting of the general ban on public demonstrations and upholding the freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, which are crucial to making meaningful progress as elections draw nearer.

As elections approach, the deteriorating security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is also of concern. The activities of armed groups, the Mai Mai and militia could have an impact both on the final preparations for elections and on election day itself. While ensuring that the security of the elections remains the primary responsibility of the Government, MONUSCO will remain fully engaged in all areas of its

operations to support activities of the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in preventing and mitigating the activities of such groups.

With fewer than four months to go before elections are held, it is clear that the required levels of confidence and consensus around key issues must still be built. It is also imperative that respect for fundamental rights and freedoms be assured throughout the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in a consistent manner, so that, moving forward, all Congolese citizens can participate freely and fairly in all stages of the electoral process. Failure to allow for political engagement and participation, as foreseen by the Congolese Constitution, could jeopardize the peaceful nature and the credibility of the polls.

(*spoke in French*)

It is in that context that I reiterate my call on all stakeholders, in particular the Congolese authorities, to ensure that the elections on 23 December are credible and peaceful in order to allow for the first peaceable transition of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is an essential step on the path to stability and development in the country.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to reiterate that MONUSCO stands ready to provide support for the elections, if need be.

**The President**: I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing and offer of support from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I now give the floor to Monseigneur Utembi.

**Monseigneur Utembi** (*spoke in French*): The Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO) sincerely thanks you, Madam President, for having invited it to brief Council members on developments in the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This demonstrates the confidence of the Security Council in the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo. CENCO welcomed the invitation to participate in today's meeting, which is very important to the country in its quest for a peaceful solution to the sociopolitical crisis that began in 2016. That is why CENCO eagerly seized the opportunity to brief the members of the Security Council on developments in the electoral process under way in our country.

CENCO has duly noted the significant steps taken in the electoral process, such as the filing of candidacies for the presidential and legislative elections. Overall, the candidate nominations took place in a peaceful climate and a patriotic spirit, with the exception of the nomination of Mr. Moïse Katumbi. With regard to his nomination, we encourage the Government to respect the New Year's Eve agreement.

The appointment of candidates for the presidential election by the Majorité présidentielle was another positive step. CENCO commends the President of the Republic, the Independent National Electoral Commission, the political stakeholders and the people of the country as a whole for having contributed to the successful completion of that step, which facilitates peaceful dynamics at the highest level of the State.

The Government is committed to financing the electoral process. CENCO encourages the Government to continue financing to the end of the process within a time frame that will guarantee the effective holding of the elections on 23 December. Nonetheless, our current joy will have been illusory and fleeting if the ongoing electoral process does not lead to the holding of credible, transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections, because if the elections are biased we will remain mired in crisis. We run the risk of such an outcome if we do not take into account the following concerns: first, the lack of clarification of the situation of the millions of people who have been registered without fingerprints; secondly, the lack of consensus concerning the use of voting machines; and thirdly, the failure to implement the important political de-escalation measures stipulated within the New Year's Eve agreement.

In view of the aforementioned facts, CENCO reiterates the following recommendations to the Independent National Electoral Commission and to the Government.

First, the provisional list of registered individuals should be published as soon as possible so that the Congolese people can be assured of the validity of individuals genuinely registered without fingerprints.

Secondly, consensus on the use of voting machines should be sought in order to promote the holding of tripartite talks between the Independent National Electoral Commission; the Majorité présidentielle, which is now called the Front commun pour le Congo; and the opposition, including national and international experts.

Thirdly, the New Year's Eve agreement should be fulfilled, inter alia, through the implementation of the remaining de-escalation measures aimed at preventing the misinterpretation of the law and the manipulation of justice to arbitrarily exclude certain candidates from running in the elections. Non-inclusive elections would be an obstacle to the process of achieving peace in the country.

Fourthly, the observation of the elections by national and international organizations that have relevant experience and express their wish to participate in the electoral process on 23 December should be facilitated. That would demonstrate that we have nothing to hide throughout the electoral process. The credibility of the elections depends to a great extent on the observation of those elections by national and international groups that are interested in doing so.

CENCO intends to contribute to the observation of the coming elections and hoprd to deploy 1,026 observers over the long term and 40,000 observers over the short term. It is counting on the support of the Independent National Electoral Commission to accredit all of those observers, who will be well trained, and to facilitate their important work, which will undoubtedly contribute to reducing tensions following the elections.

CENCO is very much counting on the involvement and commitment of the international community, in particular the Southern African Development Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo to peacefully overcome the crisis by respecting the stipulations of the New Year's Eve agreement.

**The President**: I thank Monseigneur Utembi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Furaha.

**Ms. Furaha** (*spoke in French*): At the outset, we would like to thank the Council for the opportunity it has given to the women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which bears witness to the extent to which the Security Council attaches importance to women's role and their participation in public affairs. We also thank the various partners, including the Department for International Development, the National Democratic Institute and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which has always supported our involvement to ensure that we are able to carry out our work.

We are here today to speak about the participation of Congolese women in the electoral process and their role in it. First of all, we note that, during the 2006 elections, Congolese women were widely mobilized as voters, candidates, observers and witnesses in the hope of achieving a peaceful and developed Democratic Republic of the Congo with inclusive and participatory governance. Furthermore, we note that 52 per cent of women were registered to vote. In spite of the fact that less than 15 per cent of the candidates were women and their weak election results at the same rate, it should be noted that there was an important awareness-raising among women's awareness, who had a great opportunity to exercise their civil rights as voters, candidates, observers and witnesses.

The national and international stakeholders played a key role in that mobilization of women. The international community, through MONUSCO, played a lead role in the organization and holding of those elections. The fact that local and municipal elections, which had been expected to be an opportunity for women, were not held became a source of discouragement. Women voted more for men and their illiteracy negatively affected their choice.

From 2011 to 2018, we noticed a genuine decline in the motivation of citizens, in particular among women politicians and potential candidates. The reason for that discouragement can be found in various issues, including age-old customs, the lack of financial resources, political reasons and so forth. As voting cards served as identity cards, some women registered to vote in order to obtain an identity card, but not in order to actually vote, which had some consequences for female candidates.

The 2010 review of the Constitution and the fact that elections were not held in 2016 led to an impasse and political crisis and to debates about the legitimacy of President Joseph Kabila Kabange, the National Assembly and the Senate. That led to peace initiatives to defuse the crisis, including the New Year's Eve agreement. Unfortunately, however, we noted a weak representation of women, with only 18 per cent in the dialogues organized by the African Union and three women out of 32 participating in the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo. We note that during

those processes, the number of women candidates remained below than 15 per cent.

The objective of the Rien Sans Les Femmes movement is to achieve gender equality in decision-making roles at all levels within the Democratic Republic of the Congo. One of the first endeavours undertaken by the movement was to draw up a petition with over 207,315 signatures to the national Parliament to urge that the hurdles preventing women to participate as candidates in the elections be removed, in accordance with article 14 of the Constitution, on gender parity. Unfortunately, the response of the National Assembly was not encouraging and consequently, we saw a low percentage of women registered on the electoral lists and their last-minute adhesion to join other political parties that would accept them but woul.d not guarantee their election.

We are also seeing the weak democratization of some political parties and their inability to form a political elite that can assume the challenges of participative and inclusive governance, the non-implementation of the law on funding political parties, and provincial and national assemblies with a representation of less than 15 per cent of women since 2006. Despite the competence of some women politicians and candidates, the majority of the Congolese people remains hesitant to vote for women being able to vote. There is little funding for electoral expenses and campaigns, a lack of encouragement for voters to go out and vote for women, and an unfamiliarity with the voting machines among women. In that context, there are also other challenges and fears linked to the holding of democratic, transparent, free and peaceful elections in 2018.

We also note, in the context of the partnership between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the international community, that the Government has stated that it does not want to relive the experiences of the past, when funding was given with the intention of influencing the elections. That comment is concerning to the Congolese people since refusing external funding for the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not encouraging. It is also worrying that there is a risk of accreditation being refused to international and even national observers, in some cases, as well as the mobilization of international partners to monitor the elections.

With respect to the challenges related to peace and security, there are fears about the willingness of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to guarantee the nationwide security of the elections and the prevention of gender-based violence before, during and after the elections, as well as concerns about the need to ensure free, transparent and peaceful elections so that the results will be accepted. We also note that the lack of consensus about the use of voting machines and the debates about voter registration remain disruptive. We must also underline that specific support for female candidates is particularly needed. Against that backdrop, we would like to make the following recommendations to our partners, the Security Council and the international community.

We recommend that the Congolese Government be encouraged to ensure the effective holding of free, transparent, democratic, inclusive and peaceful elections, in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000), and urged to understand the importance of the international community's support in the organization of the elections so as to ensure that they are fully credible, as well as to prevent any electoral violence. We also recommend that it reactivate the logistical and security role of MONUSCO and persuade the majority and opposition political parties of the need for the elections to be effectively held.

We ask our international partners to support women and other civil society organizations in order to energize mobilization in favour of the participation of women in decision-making roles, and especially their election as candidates. We also support awareness-raising among voters, as well as training for male and female observers for the forthcoming elections.

To the Congolese Government, we recommend that it reassure the Congolese people about the effectiveness of the December elections, as well as the forthcoming local and municipal elections. We further recommend that it make the most of external partnerships to overcome the logistical and security challenges; ensure the safety and security of women before, during and after the elections so as to avoid the country falling into chaos; implement the law on funding given to political parties; and establish an interministerial committee and a national council on gender equality.

**The President**: I thank Ms. Furaha her for her very helpful briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

**Mrs. Haley** (United States of America): I thank my friends from the French delegation for allowing me to speak, as I have to leave early. I thank the briefers for updating the Security Council on elections planning in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In particular, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for calling this very important and timely meeting because we are, in fact, running out of time.

Today, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is 118 days away from election day. That is less than four months for the Government to finish organizing free, fair and credible elections. Fortunately, we have already reached an important milestone. President Kabila did not register as a presidential candidate before the deadline, which guarantees that he cannot legally stand for re-election or legitimately serve as President past January 2019. The United States welcomes reports of President Kabila's intent not to seek a third term. That is an important step towards the peaceful transition of power. History will look favourably on President Kabila's decision if it culminates in free, fair and credible elections that translate into a lasting democracy for the Congolese people — a legacy that we hope he earns in the coming months.

While we recognize progress, we cannot deny the red flags and unanswered questions that remain. With less than four months to go, how will the Independent National Electoral Commission transport elections materials to more than 90,000 polling places? Will there be enough voting machines or will authorities extend voting by days, or even weeks? Can the authorities recharge voting machines with only a 12-hour battery life? Have election organizers widely tested the machines? Will voters, many of whom have never used a touch screen, know how to use them? Are organizers preparing paper ballots as a backup if the electronic voting machines fail? Those questions raise problems, but there are solutions.

The Congolese authorities should permit the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to provide logistical and transportation support. MONUSCO has the available assets that the Mission is ready and willing to deploy. The Congolese authorities should also let voters use paper ballots. That is a trusted, tested, transparent and easy-to-use voting method. The Democratic Republic of the Congo can and should use *the same operations* that it successfully implemented in 2006 and 2011, including with support from the United Nations. Paper ballots were good enough to get President Kabila elected, and they should be good enough as a fail-safe means to elect his successor.

I had the opportunity to meet with President Kabila last year. If he were here today, I would tell him that it is admirable that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo wants to self-finance and self-support its elections. But is it doable? Is it realistic? Is it even necessary? It does not insult the Democratic Republic of the Congo's sovereignty for the Independent National Electoral Commission to accept logistical support from MONUSCO. Instead, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is wasting precious resources to buy capabilities that are already available to it.

Meanwhile, my Government and others are devoting tens of millions of dollars to life-saving humanitarian assistance for the country. It is troubling that President Kabila and the Independent National Electoral Commission refused the assistance. We respect the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a sovereign State Member of the United Nations, but it cannot help but raise suspicion when the Congolese Government refuses the assistance that would help make free, fair and credible elections a reality, while at the same time it continues to accept the humanitarian assistance that so many of us continue to provide it with.

Other red flags add to our suspicions. We are deeply concerned about the Independent National Electoral Commission's decision on 24 August to disqualify some opposition presidential candidates for what appear to be political reasons. This is not how an electoral process or any independent electoral commission should function. We also praise those candidates who feel that they have been unjustly disqualified for using the appeals process that was open to them. By abiding by the rules of the domestic process, opposition and civil society organizations further reinforced just how much independence the Independent National Electoral Commission has lost during Mr. Nangaa's tenure.

The National Assembly President also continues to deny the wish of an opposition party to replace its candidate for the Independent National Electoral Commission, in violation of the 31 December 2016 agreement. The Minister of Justice continues to detain dozens of opposition members and civil society activists, again in violation of the agreement. There must be a political space for candidates to campaign, citizens to assemble and opposition members to speak

freely and without fear. There can be no violence, intimidation, harassment or silencing of the opposition. Political parties must be able to compete on a level playing field.

We will never know the will of the Congolese people without an environment conducive to elections. We have 118 days. These problems are fixable. There is still enough time. The suspicions we have may amount to nothing. Ultimately, however, the Congolese Government must choose. The hopes for self-determination of more than 80 million Congolese citizens are riding on the decisions that President Kabila and the Independent National Electoral Commission will make in the days and weeks ahead. Now is the time for choosing. We ask them to choose support from MONUSCO, choose free fair and credible elections on 23 December, and choose a peaceful transition of power in January 2019, and in so doing choose a better future for generations of Congolese people to come.

**Mrs. Gueguen** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her excellent briefing and more generally for her exemplary commitment to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also thank the President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, Monseigneur Marcel Utembi, whose involvement is essential to the success of the electoral process, for his extremely clear briefing. Lastly, I thank Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha, spokesperson for Rien Sans Les Femmes, for her role in fighting for women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and their participation in the political and electoral processes.

The 23 December elections will be a historic moment for the Democratic Republic of the Congo in that they will ensure a peaceful transfer of power for the first time in the country's history. For the country, it offers a unique opportunity to make a lasting commitment to achieving peace and stability. Those elections belong to the Congolese people. France reaffirms its full respect for the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and encourages the Government to take all measures necessary to ensure a smooth electoral process and the holding of free, inclusive and transparent elections, in accordance with the set timetable and the Constitution. The success of that crucial step in the political history of the country is the shared responsibility and commitment of all. It is therefore up to all stakeholders to maintain the spirit of dialogue and consensus resulting from the 31 December 2016 agreement. I will emphasize two essential conditions on which the success of the electoral process depends.

The first concerns the fact that it must take place in an environment of trust. The opening of political and democratic space, as well as respect for fundamental freedoms — beginning with the freedom of expression and demonstration — are essential. France calls on the Congolese Government to lift the general ban on demonstrations and to release political prisoners as soon as possible, in accordance with the de-escalation measures provided for in the New Year's Eve agreement, as Monseigneur Utembi recalled earlier. In that regard, respect for human rights and the commitments made by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Human Rights Council in Geneva are of the utmost importance. France also encourages the Congolese authorities to ensure the participation of women in the political process, from which they continue to be excluded too often, as the statistics cited by Ms. Zerrougui earlier highlight.

Respect for the electoral calendar is essential. The trust of the Congolese people depends largely on that factor. Elections must be held on the scheduled date in accordance with the commitment of all parties. France welcomes the legislative and technical progress reflected in the publication of the provisional list of candidates by the Independent National Electoral Commission on the evening of 24 August. Furthermore, we welcome once again President Kabila's decision not to run again in accordance with the Constitution. In order to maintain this positive dynamic, any consideration of altering the electoral calendar must be avoided at all costs.

The next step will be for the Constitutional Court to consider appeals concerning candidatures invalidated by the Independent National Electoral Commission, which must be submitted in the coming days before the publication of the definitive list on 19 September. The decisions of the Court must allow an environment of trust in the electoral process to be preserved, while inclusiveness will be an important factor in the success of the elections. Moreover, France fully respects the sovereign decision of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to assume the responsibility of financing and logistical support for the holding of elections. It nevertheless recalls that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is ready to provide the Democratic Republic of the Congo with

logistical support if needed. To that end, it is essential that the competent authorities provide MONUSCO with the information it needs to provide timely support as appropriate.

Technical issues have yet to be resolved. France calls once again on the Independent National Electoral Commission to establish a wider consensus on the use of voting machines by helping all citizens to access and grow comfortable with them. Moreover, we encourage the Independent National Electoral Commission to implement the recommendations made by the International Organization of la Francophonie in its June audit, beginning with the publication of the voter register, on which 6.6 million people are registered without finger prints. Far from being anecdotal, that technical point raises an issue relating to the credibility of the entire process.

The second condition concerns the fact that elections must take place within a peaceful environment. France remains concerned about the security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In some regions, the situation is likely to call into question the electoral process. Tensions in the Kasai have claimed many lives, while experts commissioned by the Human Rights Council have reported allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The situation in the east of the country, particularly in North and South Kivu, remains extremely worrying and all the more sensitive since the new Ebola epidemic, which was declared on 1 August in the Beni area. In that connection, France welcomes MONUSCO deployments in areas of violence, especially in the eastern part of the country. It is essential to continue to reconfigure MONUSCO so as to strengthen the protection of civilians. Securing future elections and providing logistical support for them, if the authorities so desire, must be MONUSCO's short-term priority.

France stands shoulder to shoulder with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With its partners in the Security Council, the African Union and in the region as a whole, it will remain committed to ensuring that the electoral process leads to the holding of elections that are free, credible, transparent and inclusive. Beyond the deadlines in December, it is the very future of the country that is at stake in the months to come — a future, we hope, of stability, development and peace.

**Mr. Meza-Cuadra** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and the noteworthy briefings by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Monseigneur Marcel Utembi and Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha. We would also like to express our gratitude for the important work they undertake in their respective domains.

Peru is closely monitoring progress against the electoral calendar in the Democratic Republic of the Congo under the leadership of the Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission. We underscore the need to ensure that December's electoral process is legitimate, democratic, credible, inclusive and peaceful. In this regard, we welcome the decision of President Joseph Kabila not to seek re-election. We believe that it is vital that the international community, and the Security Council in particular, be kept informed about the process so as to support the Congolese Government and citizens in their efforts to ensure that the process is a success and to build sustainable peace.

The process clearly involves a number of significant challenges that must be overcome. In our view, a deadline must urgently be set for an audit of the voting machines and to devise alternative plans developed in case the machines do not function correctly or difficulties arise in their use. To that end, we appreciate the proposal put forward by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo that a team of independent technical experts could ensure that the machines work correctly. Likewise, the Government could detail the logistical support it may require from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for the timely transfer of electoral material. We also view as valid the recommendation of the International Organization of la Francophonie regarding the need for the prompt publication of the list of voters so as to allow for its verification and amendment if necessary, thereby ensuring the necessary climate of trust in the process.

All of this should take place in the context of strict respect by the Government for the free exercise of the political rights of all political groups and citizens in general, and pursuant to the electoral code of conduct. In this regard, we are particularly concerned about the fact that draft legislation on confidence-building measures has not been considered, including the draft amendments to the 2015 law on public demonstrations. In this regard, we encourage the Congolese authorities and all political actors to step up efforts to promote the

broad participation of women in the electoral process as candidates and as voters, and in the political life of the country in general. Evidence shows that the participation of women and young people makes a decisive contribution to building sustainable peace based on a shared vision of the future.

I conclude by highlighting the important support role played by MONUSCO, the African Union, subregional organizations and neighbouring countries in ensuring that the electoral process can be a turning point towards peace, progress and development in this country.

**Mr. Volgarev** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Zerrougui, for the updated information on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the implementation of the December political agreement and the election preparations. We also note the briefings delivered by the President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo and the representative of civil society. We regret that we were not able to hear from the head of the Congolese Independent National Electoral Commission.

We agree that timely elections on 23 December would allow for a reduction of political tensions in the country. We understand that the technical and legislative preparations for the voting in December are consistent with the Independent National Electoral Commission calendar. We note the measures taken by Kinshasa, including the timely adoption of laws distributing seats in provincial legislative bodies and local councils, as well as the publication of a list of parties permitted to run in the elections and other associations.

We welcome the audit of the electoral list conducted under the auspices of the International Organization of la Francophonie and the fact that half of the political parties in the country have signed up to an electoral code of conduct. We note President Kabila's statement before the National Assembly in July, at which the Congolese leader once again restated his commitment to respecting the national Constitution.

Finally, the registration process for presidential candidates has very recently come to a close. As Council members will be aware, the Front commun pour le Congo has put forward one candidate: Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary. We believe that these signals are appropriate and timely, and encourage opposition parties to refrain from pushing a negative agenda. We call on colleagues not to demonize the decision of the Congolese Independent National Electoral Commission to use electronic voting machines. We agree that in order to avoid any problems in the electoral process, Kinshasa must guarantee its sustainable financing.

We respect the decision of the Congolese Government to support this process mainly on its own resources, while we also draw attention to the potential logistical support that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo could offer.

We do not rule out the need for the Congolese authorities to update their implementation of confidence-building measures, including on the significant aspects of the political agreement regarding high-profile cases against political actors abroad. However, we encourage all opposition parties in the Republic to work with Kinshasa and the Independent National Electoral Commission to avoid any outbreak of violence. It is, moreover, imperative in our view that the national sovereignty and legislation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo be respected.

It is our understanding that the role of the United Nations Mission in organizing and holding elections should not go beyond the mandate anchored in resolution 2409 (2017). The protection of civilians in the electoral context should be carried out with full observance of basic peacekeeping principles and without interference in the domestic affairs of Kinshasa. We believe that it is up to the Congolese people themselves decide their own fate, and that the objective of the international community should be to provide assistance in those areas where it is genuinely necessary.

Elections alone are no panacea. We must focus on addressing the root causes of the crisis, and on the need to continue the fight against illegal armed groups in the east of the country, which continue to pose a threat to the civilian population.

**Mr. Van Oosterom** (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I thank you, Madam President, for having convened this meeting at the request of several Council members, including the Kingdom of the Netherlands. I thank the briefers for the enlightening information they have provided on the election preparations. I reiterate our support for Special Representative Leila Zerrougui.

Today, I will address three main points: electoral preparations; the implementation of the

New Year's Eve agreement; and the support of the international community.

My first point relates to the electoral preparations. The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes President Kabila's decision not to seek a third term, in accordance with the Congolese Constitution. This represents a crucial step in preparing for elections. We also welcome the recent increased engagement on the part of the Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties, and we welcome the creation of additional provincial courts of appeal.

Nonetheless, much remains to be done to ensure that the elections are free, credible, transparent and peaceful. It is essential that all parties have confidence in the Commission and in the electoral preparations. A number of political parties have expressed concerns regarding key steps, including the timely delivery, storage and distribution of voting machines, as well as their use. Furthermore, the means for a citizens' audit of the electoral list are still not clearly established. Those are all significant challenges for the Commission, and we encourage all parties to commit to dialogue in order to resolve them. We note with satisfaction that the Congolese Government has funded a part of the electoral budget. However, it is essential that the remaining funds be transferred on time. We would like to know whether Mr. Nangaa believes the electoral budget will be covered. We emphasize the willingness of the international community to provide logistical support. We encourage Commission and the Government to make the relevant requests by the deadlines. We regret that the head of the Commission, Mr. Nangaa, had to cancel his participation in this briefing.

My second point has to do with the importance of the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement, which is incumbent upon all signatory Congolese parties. That agreement is the only possible way for the elections to be accepted by the entire Congolese population. Consequently, the continued lack of significant progress in the implementation of de-escalation measures is a cause for serious concern. All candidates must be able to participate under equal conditions of competition. The electoral process must be inclusive. CENI has deemed six candidates ineligible. We call on all stakeholders to continue to show maximum restraint pending the results of any appeals. We urge the authorities to ensure that the process is inclusive.

Another critical step is the liberation of all political prisoners, including emblematic cases. I would like to note that prisoners of conscience, including the five members of Filimbi, have been denied their right to a fair trial.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is also gravely concerned by the low level of women's participation, as was underscored by Ms. Zerrougui and Ms. Solange LwashigaFuraha. Women comprise 12 per cent of candidates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a setback for the region. Certain political parties have no female candidates. Ms. Lwashiga Furaha's evidence, however, that the country does not lack female leaders. We call on all parties to intensify their efforts to include Congolese women in the electoral process.

My third and final point is on the will of the international community to support the Congolese people. In addition to the electoral process, the fight against the new Ebola epidemic in the east of the country also requires international support. Combined with the serious security risks, this new epidemic could easily devolve into a new humanitarian disaster. All Member States must do all they can to prevent an escalation of the crisis. We welcome that the Council will have an opportunity to discuss the situation tomorrow morning.

In conclusion, the Council's upcoming visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo next October will be one of solidarity with the Congolese people. It will take place at a key moment. With the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other relevant stakeholders, the Council will continue to work alongside the Democratic Republic of the Congo throughout this crucial year. We cannot simply look away.

**Mr. Umarov** (Kazakhstan): We join others in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui for her insightful briefing. I also extend our appreciation to the President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, Monsignor Marcel Utembi, and the representative of Rien Sans Les Femmes, Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha, for their highly informative updates.

We reiterate the importance of implementing the 31 December 2016 political agreement by all parties. In that regard, we welcome the recent announcement by President Joseph Kabila not to run for re-election.

which is an important step towards a peaceful transition of power.

We also note the importance of organizing fair, transparent and inclusive elections as scheduled. This nation-owned process should be held with respect for the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and unity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We welcome the efforts of the national authorities and the Independent National Electoral Commission to prepare the elections in accordance with the electoral calendar, including the finalization of the voter register, as well as the list of candidates for presidential and legislative elections. We positively note and encourage further interaction of the Commission to settle disputes with all the participants in the political process.

We call on the Congolese authorities to continue implementing measures to create conditions conducive to holding credible elections, including the meaningful participation of women. Further efforts must be made to establish a constructive and inclusive inter-Congolese dialogue, to achieve political progress and to build confidence in the electoral process, including its technical elements. We welcome the committed determination of the Government to assume full responsibility for funding the elections. We encourage national authorities to continue cooperating with the Commission to provide the necessary resources.

At the same time, we note the readiness of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to provide logistical assistance in preparing for the elections, and we call for increased cooperation between the Independent National Electoral Commission and MONUSCO. It is very important to eliminate in good time the potential procedural, technical and logistic difficulties, which can jeopardize the results of both the political and electoral processes. We commend MONUSCO for providing considerable assistance in preparation for the elections. It is also important for the Congolese authorities to take all the necessary measures to ensure security during the elections, with the support of MONUSCO.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is entering a decisive phase that will determine its future. In that regard, we call on all regional and subregional organizations, as well as neighbouring States, to continue to promote the political and electoral process to ensure favourable conditions for holding timely and peaceful elections, which will have positive consequences for stability throughout the region.

**Mr. Lie Cheng** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zarrougui and the President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, Monseigneur Utembi, for their briefings. We also listened carefully to the statement of Ms. Furaha on behalf of civil society.

Peace, stability and the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has attracted the attention of the international community, particularly that of the countries of the region. Lately, the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been generally stable, and the preparations for the general elections are progressing steadily. The Security Council should fully recognize and support the elections and provide constructive assistance to the country. The forthcoming general elections constitute a critical step in the political process of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The electoral support provided by the international community should respect the genuine needs of the country and correspond to the real situation on the ground.

China has always believed that a political solution is the only way to resolve the issues of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council should continue to support the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other regional and subregional organizations, as well as countries in the region, by playing a leading role in mediation and by encouraging those organizations and countries to enhance communication and engagement with Congolese parties through their respective channels. In particular, the focus should be on listening to the views of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and respecting its ownership of the political process, while also encouraging all parties to take concrete actions to return to a path of political settlement through dialogue and consultations and on effectively implementing the political agreement of 31 December 2016.

While providing assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the international community should ensure that its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity are fully respected. We should help the country to strengthen its own security capabilities so that it can achieve peace and stability independently.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) should function strictly in accordance with its mandate and strengthen consultations with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

China has always played an active and constructive role with regard to matters concerning peace and security in Africa and has always supported African countries in seeking African solutions to African issues. The 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation summit will be held in Beijing on 3 and 4 September under the theme "Towards an even stronger community with a shared future through win-win cooperation". Leaders from China and African countries will meet in Beijing to discuss plans for future cooperation and to propose new measures to strengthen comprehensive cooperation between China and Africa.

China has always supported the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and has actively participated in peacekeeping operations there. We have also provided humanitarian assistance, including medicine and food, to the country and have actively participated in its socioeconomic development. China stands ready to work with the international community to continue to play a constructive role in achieving peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**Ms. Wronecka** (Poland): I would like to begin by extending my thanks to the briefers: the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui; Monseigneur Marcel Utembi, President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo; and Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha, spokesperson for Rien Sans Les Femmes, for their informative briefings.

The election process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is entering its final phase. In that regard, we welcome President Joseph Kabila Kabange's decision to respect the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to step down at the end of the year.

The timely holding of the elections is crucial to ensuring the stabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We therefore call on the Government, the Independent National Electoral Commission and all stakeholders to work together towards the holding of elections in December, with full respect for the Constitution and the 31 December 2016 agreement. Close cooperation with civil society, in particular women's representatives, and women's involvement in the electoral process are crucial to ensuring equal the representation of women and men in decision-taking at all levels in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that regard, we commend the efforts of Rien Sans Les Femme aimed at ensuring the broadest possible participation of women in the upcoming elections and at supporting female candidates.

Poland also reiterates its call for the peaceful and timely transfer of power in January 2019, as set out in the electoral calendar and in accordance with the Congolese Constitution.

We strongly believe that the effective implementation of the December agreement, including confidence-building measures, as well as compliance with the electoral timeline, is essential to a peaceful and credible electoral process. Respect for fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, is crucial to a democratic transition of power and the peace and stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It goes without saying that the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has a significant impact on the stability of Central and sub-Saharan Africa. A peaceful and developing Congo could provide a huge boost to the whole continent.

Finally, let me reiterate our full support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as to the men and women of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**Mr. Orrenius Skau** (Sweden): Allow me to begin by thanking the briefers for their comprehensive update on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We commend their tireless efforts, and we express our full support for their challenging and important tasks ahead of the 23 December presidential, legislative and provincial elections.

We welcome the progress made in the technical preparations of those elections. The registration of candidates was an important milestone, and we note the list of approved presidential and parliamentary candidates presented by the Independent National Electoral Commission over the weekend. The announcement by President Kabila Kabange that he intends to abide by the Constitution and not to seek another term is particularly welcome.

The remaining technical challenges must now be addressed in a timely manner. In that regard, efforts to ensure women's full and equal participation in the political processes must be stepped up. It was disappointing that only a small number of women were registered as candidates for the provincial and legislative elections. While lessons for the future should be drawn from that failure, we now need to focus on supporting the candidates who are registered and on providing conditions that allow for women to actively participate in the process ahead and to cast their votes in a free and secure manner on election day. Such efforts should include support, encourage women in the voter registration process and guarantee voting free from pressure, such as ensuring individual access to voting cards, informing individuals of their voting rights and guaranteeing safe access to polling stations. With regard to supporting women candidates, initiatives should be supported so as to prevent sexual attacks, sexual harassment and gender-based sabotage of the campaigns of women candidates. To that end, we encourage the authorities and the United Nations to coordinate closely with the relevant civil society organizations, including in order to better understand the issues as they arise and to make sure that citizens are well informed.

Technical preparations are not enough to secure free, fair and credible elections. The current security situation, with the continued high levels of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, and other human rights violations and abuses, must also be addressed. There is an urgent need to ensure the opening of political space for parties and civil society and to respect freedom of speech and peaceful assembly. In that regard, the implementation of confidence-building measures, as per the December 2016 agreement, remains of critical importance. Trust in the electoral process among all stakeholders will be key to the credibility of the elections.

The joint communiqué of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Security Council of July (SC/13430), as well as the joint communiqué of the AU, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region of Africa and the United Nations on the Peace and Security Cooperation Framework, demonstrates the firm international consensus on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The message is clear: the world expects the holding of credible and inclusive elections in December, leading to a democratic and peaceful transfer of power. It is now important that the Council continue to work closely and actively with the region to ensure that that common objective is achieved.

United Nations support to the electoral process is critical. The continued active engagement of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui, making full use of her good offices, will be essential, and we should give the Special Representative of the Secretary-General our full support. We note the ambitious intentions of the Independent National Electoral Commission to provide logistics, and we encourage the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to continue to prepare for assisting the authorities in that massive undertaking, if needed. Support from the United Nations should, however, always be dependent on national efforts so as to ensure the credibility of the process.

Finally, the Ebola virus outbreak in North Kivu last week is deeply concerning. As we know, the security situation in that region is dire, providing a very complex operating environment for the needed response. Given that it is also a populous region, hosting more than 1 million internally displaced persons, with international borders, it is a situation that deserves our full attention. We painfully learned from the outbreak in West Africa in 2014 that such epidemics can also risk having implications for peace and security. Sweden has therefore requested an update by the World Health Organization on the situation in the Security Council tomorrow, and will continue to follow the situation closely.

**Mrs. Cordova Soria** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Plurinational State of Bolivia is grateful for the briefings by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Monsignor Marcel Utembi, President of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, and Ms. Solange Lwashiga Furaha, spokesperson of the civil society organization Rien Sans Les Femmes, whom we commend for her work and that of her organization to ensure the participation of Congolese women at all levels, in particular their work to ensure women's participation in the upcoming elections.

We highlight the continued progress and commitment shown by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meeting the deadlines set by the electoral calendar, in particular with regard to its inclusive work on candidate registration by formally inviting all political parties and, subsequently, by opening offices for the reception and management of candidatures. In that regard, we hope that all legally qualified candidates can participate in the upcoming elections in a transparent, credible, inclusive and timely environment conducive to a peaceful transfer of power.

We commend the Government on providing additional funds to the Commission électorale nationale indépendante to enable it to conduct its duties. We also commend the Commission on coordinating logistical and operational matters with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and encourage it to continue such coordination and training on the use of voting machines, in particular in remote areas.

The international community must continue working to strengthen the capacities of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to meet coordination and logistics challenges in the upcoming elections, while respecting the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We reiterate that, for elections to bring about a peaceful transfer of Government and political tensions to be defused, parties must implement the confidence-building measures stipulated in the 2016 New Year's Eve political agreement, whose full and effective implementation we once again advocate. Both the Government and the opposition must work together in order to make progress on such measures.

We call on all parties to work together ahead of the elections, in which the full participation of women and young people is essential. We must step up our efforts to ensure that women have a meaningful place in all political processes, including in the areas of prevention, negotiation, mediation and peacebuilding. Building societies that promote gender equality makes peace processes inclusive and leads to sustainable peace. If women are not the main actors in such processes, we will not achieve genuine peace.

We welcome the support of regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of Central African States, the African Union and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, and of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region in preparing for the elections. We encourage them to continue working together, in close coordination with the Government. Similarly, we commend the work of the Southern African Development Community and MONUSCO, which provide positive support for the holding of elections. We encourage them to continue their cooperation with the Commission électorale nationale indépendante.

We are convinced that the Congolese people and institutions must make the decisions on the future of their country. We see that as a decisive factor in promoting peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Similarly, we believe that, in order to achieve structural change, leading to stability and the strengthening of the rule of law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the root causes of the conflict must be addressed, one of which is the country's lack of control over its own natural resources. The sovereign administration of national wealth is paramount in order to ensure stability and the rule of law.

Lastly, we express our solidarity with the victims of the Ebola outbreak and commend the Congolese authorities, the international community and the World Health Organization for their swift response to the health crisis.

**Mr. Alotaibi** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank all today's briefers — Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Monseigneur Utembi and Ms. Furaha — for their valuable briefings.

Today's meeting follows the announcement of President Joseph Kabila Kabange of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that he will not run for the presidential elections scheduled to be held on 23 December. We welcome that important step and the other positive steps that were recently made in the political process, including the registration of candidates for presidential and legislative elections and the respect shown by President Kabila for the Constitution and the New Year's Eve political agreement.

Given the recent positive steps taken in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during this month, and nearly four months ahead of the presidential elections, which we hope will be held on time and without delay, we would like to take the opportunity of today's meeting to reiterate the content of the press statement issued by the Security Council (SC/13455)

on 13 August. The press statement underscored the importance of a commitment by all the Congolese political actors and the institutions responsible for organizing the elections to prepare for the success of the electoral process, leading to a peaceful transfer of power, in accordance with the Constitution and the New Year's Eve political agreement. The statement also called on Congolese stakeholders to create the necessary conditions in order to ensure an environment conducive to peaceful and inclusive political activities, and to hold free, fair, transparent and conclusive elections with the participation of all Congolese during every stage of the elections. The statement reiterated the importance of taking measures to help confidence-building and respect for the fundamental rights and the elections timetable.

In the light of such preparations by the Congolese Government and the Commission électorale nationale indépendante, we encourage them to request the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to provide logistical and technical support, especially since the Government intends to use electronic voting on the election day for the first time.

I would like to underscore the importance of the commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is a large country with a large population and very rich in natural resources. It is the heart of the African continent and the neighbouring countries. Its security and political stability has undoubtedly an impact on that of the neighbouring countries and the whole region.

Finally, working closely with the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and other main organizations and regional stakeholders would contribute to the implementation of the New Year's Eve political agreement and the success of the upcoming electoral process.

**Mr. Esono Mbengono** (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her comprehensive briefing and ongoing efforts as Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also thank Monseigneur Marcel Utembi, President of the National Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Solange Furaha, Spokesperson of civil society organization Rien Sans les Femmes, for their respective updates on the current situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular preparations for the December elections.

I am honoured to make this statement on behalf of the three African countries represented on the Security Council, whose group Equatorial Guinea is currently coordinating.

We all agree that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a critical juncture. While reaffirming the sovereignty of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, its institutions, leadership of the electoral process and ultimate responsibility to conduct the process effectively, the Security Council must closely follow developments in the country with a view to preparing for successful elections in December. We welcome the recent milestones and successes, including the peaceful completion of voter registration, the appointment of members of the Constitutional Court and the establishment of additional provincial appellate courts where they did not previously exist. The finalization of the registration of candidates for the next presidential elections is already a historic achievement. In that regard, we would like to express our appreciation to President Joseph Kabila Kabange for his contribution to the successful conclusion of the registration of candidates for the presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We recommend that the remaining challenges related to confidence-building measures be addressed by the relevant institutions and authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as soon as possible.

We note with concern the small number of registered female candidates — only 12 per cent — and hope that they will receive the necessary support in the run-up to the elections to ensure meaningful participation by women in the country's political system. As we all know, the success of the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will depend upon the inclusiveness of the electoral process and on the commitment of all political stakeholders, whom we urge to reject all forms of violence and exercise the utmost restraint and refrain from provocative actions to avoid escalating tensions. We therefore recommend that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all relevant actors work in a spirit of cooperation and commitment to ensure a historic moment that leads to the first peaceful transfer of political power in the country.

Congolese actors must set common and well-deserved goals to move the country forward.

In that spirit, the ability of the Independent National Electoral Commission to meet the electoral calendar will remain a priority to ensure a peaceful, credible and transparent electoral process. That is a critical and determining factor in ensuring positive results that will lead to a democratic transfer of political power in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and no efforts should be spared in implementing the electoral calendar. Measures, including by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), will need to be taken against all spoilers or negative forces whose actions threaten the implementation of the New Year's Eve agreement and the holding of elections. In the meantime, the most important factor in preparing for the elections is the implementation of the agreement, which is the only viable means of easing tensions. We therefore once again call on the Government, stakeholders and national actors to continue their efforts to create conditions conducive to the holding of credible and peaceful elections on the basis of the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the New Year's Eve agreement.

With regard to funding and logistical and technical support for the elections, all needs must be met through actions by the institutions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that regard, the doubts about the use of the voting machines and all related issues, including transport, staff training and energy supplies, must be laid to rest at the appropriate time. We hope that will include the timely use of logistical support available from MONUSCO scheduled for 26 July 2018. We hope that the Congolese authorities will make use of the appropriate facilities that can contribute to the successful organization of credible and transparent elections.

We emphasize that an appropriate environment must be in place in order for the elections to be held successfully. Therefore, the adoption and implementation of confidence-building measures are essential. In that regard, we are concerned about the continuing discrepancies with regard to the operation and use of voting machines and electoral lists. Those and other differences could undermine and seriously damage the credibility of the whole electoral process, if those issues are not addressed properly with due seriousness during the pre-election period. The consequences could be catastrophic given the possible post-electoral scenarios. It is therefore imperative to adopt preventive and support measures to ensure the building and strengthening of lasting peace in the country. The Commission must carry out awareness-raising campaigns aimed at all stakeholders and public opinion in order to build confidence with regard to those machines.

Addressing the problem of the a lack of tangible progress in the implementation of confidence-building measures, as reflected in the Secretary-General's update (S/2018/762, annex), is a necessary condition for the success of the elections. There is already a precedent in which the Commission and the political parties have engaged in a constructive dialogue. While we commend those initiatives, we would like to encourage all actors to follow the same path in addressing future challenges.

Activities in the coming months will be of crucial importance for the final preparations for the 2018 elections. It is essential that all Congolese parties make the necessary commitments to preserve the ongoing dialogue and consensus to facilitate the peaceful holding of elections. In that regard, it is important that the Council send a clear and unified message to all Congolese political actors.

It is also imperative that we emphasize the need for better coordination among the United Nations, the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other international and regional partners to ensure more coherent and effective support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Council's next visit to the country, which is scheduled for October is a very welcome initiative. We trust that the African Union Peace and Security Council will participate in that visit.

Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will not be possible if we do not examine the reasons that have led to this situation, such as the thorny issue of the financing of different armed groups active in the country, which has led this immense, beautiful and rich country to go through very difficult situations. The country's resources must be used for the development of its immense potential and for the benefit of its people.

With regard to Ebola, approximately six weeks ago, we were relieved to hear that the most recent pandemic had been brought under control. A new outbreak has just been announced, and we therefore express our concern and wish that it will be quickly and effectively

brought under control and that this situation does not have an impact on either the preparations or the elections themselves.

**The President**: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

I too would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui, Monseigneur Utembi and Ms. Furaha for their really helpful briefings. I think the whole Council has benefited from being able to hear from them. I also thank the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for all the work it does to try to bring peace and stability to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I just wanted to say that I think that, at this crucial time, it is important that the Security Council receive information from key players. We are therefore, like others, disappointed that the Independent National Electoral Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo was unable to join this briefing.

We very much share the concern about women's participation, which the representatives of Bolivia and Equatorial Guinea, in particular, set out so clearly after Ms. Furaha's briefing. We have noted the continuing progress on the electoral calendar, the closure of the application process for presidential candidates and the confirmation that President Kabila Kabange will not run for a third term. As others have said, that is a critical step forward, and it will help ensure that credible and inclusive elections in December lead to the Democratic Republic of the Congo's first-ever democratic and peaceful transition of power. That is an immense prize, but it is still a vulnerable one.

Ambassador Haley set out forcibly how we are still four months from elections and there is a long way to go. This about more than the timeline; it is about creating the conditions for free and fair elections. We join others in calling on the Government to implement the New Year's Eve agreement in full, and that includes the confidence-building measures, to demonstrate its credibility and potential for government. We also look to the opposition to engage constructively. The electoral process should be transparent and proactively address the concerns of Congolese civil society. I would like to make three points in that regard.

First, we call on the Independent National Electoral Commission to clarify election protocols to enable effective observation and to address concerns around the electoral register and the voting machines. Many representatives today have set out those difficulties in full and we endorse their concerns.

Secondly, we note that the Commission has refused logistical assistance from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to organize the elections, and we therefore urge the Commission to clarify its logistical plan or to accept MONUSCO's assistance urgently.

Thirdly, inclusivity is a vital element in building trust in elections. We note with concern the lack of confidence of several opposition parties in the electoral process following the release of the provisional list of presidential candidates. Elections need to be fully inclusive and they need to see the engagement of all the Congolese people.

It is clear that the Democratic Republic of the Congo faces many challenges and those have had a devastating effect upon the population. A number of speakers today referred to the violations of human rights across the country, the link between political uncertainty and instability and the other drivers of violence, which the ongoing Ebola crisis risks exacerbating. We share those concerns and hope that they can be addressed. I call again for the New Year's Eve agreement to be implemented fully. Delays in elections and a lack of public trust only risk further violence. That will have an effect not just on the Democratic Republic of the Congo but risks destabilizing the wider region too.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**Mr. Gata Mavita Wa Lufuta** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): As your presidency of the Security Council comes to an end, Madam President, allow me congratulate you on the way you have conducted the meetings during the month and thank you for taking the initiative to organize today's meeting, which addresses the evolution of the electoral process in my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my delegation's thanks to the members of the Security Council for the ongoing interest and support they have always shown the situation in my country.

After having followed the various statements of the speakers who preceded me, it seems important to me, on behalf of my Government, to express our understanding of the situation that is the subject of our discussions. Before continuing my remarks, I would like to apologize for the absence of the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission, who, because of his busy schedule, could not be here today.

To return to our topic of the day, as we reported last month before the Council (see S/PV.8318), the electoral process has evolved sufficiently. As of today, the deadline to submit candidatures has passed. It should be noted in that regard that the Commission received 19,437 applications for the provincial elections, 15,222 for the legislative elections and 25 for the presidential election.

With particular regard to the presidential election, as those present have followed, His Excellency Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Republic, has kept his word, thereby complying with the declaration to respect the Constitution of the country that he made well before the beginning of the electoral process and has maintained throughout the process.

After the submission of various applications for candidature, the Commission, in accordance with the law, proceeded to review them, after which the files of those candidates who did not meet the eligibility conditions prescribed by law were declared inadmissible. Speaking of only the case of the presidential election, out of the 25 applications registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission, six were not selected. As members of the Council can see, the process has reached cruising speed and is nearing its point of arrival.

Despite the enormous and valuable efforts by the Government and the Commission to obtain the results achieved today, some continue to be sceptical and ask questions, five of which seem particularly important to me and deserve a clarification from our part. Those are questions regarding the voting machines, the 6 million potential voters registered without fingerprints, the financing of the elections, logistics and the easing of the political climate.

As far as the voting machines is concerned, the Commission is aware of the apprehensions that have been raised by some. The Congolese themselves have also raised them. In order to bolster confidence and dispel any doubts, the Commission has undertaken an outreach and awareness-raising campaign on the use of such machines for several months. The campaign, which began with opposition and majority political parties, as well as civil society, continues today in the outlying regions with the rural populations. As we already pointed out to the Council on 26 July, although wrongly called "voting machine", it will not vote in the place of the voter. Its role is to print the ballot that the voter will put into the ballot boxes. In any case, my delegation reassures the Council that remains open and will deliver all the information that the Council would like on the technical aspects related to the use of the machines.

With regard to the 6 million voters registered without fingerprints, the International Organization of la Francophonie (IOF), which carried out the audit of the electoral register and noted the situation, made recommendations to improve registration. is working to that end. It is also important to note that the International Organization of the Francophonie emphasized in its conclusions that this situation does not call into question the status of the persons concerned as voters. In that regard, the International Organization of la Francophonie states in its conclusions that

> "The presence of 16.6 per cent of voters without fingerprints throughout the national territory does not, however, call into question their status as voters, in accordance with the law."

It is important to underline here that the audit carried out by IOF demonstrates the will of the Government and the Commission to ensure the transparency of the process for credible elections.

With regard to election financing and logistics, the Government is determined to continue its efforts to make sure that the process takes place on time and to use only funding from the country itself. As we have always stressed, our country remains open to the contributions of other partners, provided that they are without conditions and are respectful of our sovereignty.

Finally, with regard to the easing of the political climate, so as not to go back to the explanations already given in previous statements, it seems important to summarize by saying that the Government has already taken a series of measures to respond to requirements formulated in the 2016 New Year's Eve political agreement in relation to the release of political prisoners. Those who were part of that category have actually been released. The pending cases, so-called emblematic, which we have also often mentioned

before members of the Council, concern people who have committed common law offenses.

Members will agree with us that the public authorities, who are supposed to protect the weakest and promote the rule of law and the equality of citizens before the courts, cannot interfere in that kind of situation without violating the Constitution by creating a double standard of justice in the country.

I would be remiss were I to conclude on this point without coming back to challenges involving those candidates whose candidacies were invalidated. My delegation would like to inform the Council that elections in every country throughout the world are conducted based on an electoral law, which determines the criteria that candidates must meet. The same applies to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is therefore natural that candidates who have not met the prerequisite legal conditions may not run. As some Council members acknowledged, such candidates can file an appeal from now until 19 September before the relevant Court to restore their rights. Should their appeals be rejected, however, my Government would be grateful it the Council and the international community would ask the unfortunate candidates to accept the law to its full extent, the country's laws and the Constitution, as President Kabila has done.

The Congolese people are looking forward to the holding of elections, which, as members know, will take place on 23 December. The Government and the Commission are working to ensure that they are conducted smoothly, transparently and peacefully. That goal can be achieved only with the commitment of all political actors — of every stripe — who must refrain from any type of rhetoric or behaviour that could lead to tensions or public disorder. The Government therefore expects all political actors in the country to support that process constructively through positive actions. The Government expects the same behaviour of international partners. In that regard, my delegation would like to note the following points.

The electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been negatively affected to a great degree by many instances of outside interference — a situation that continues until this day. That state of affairs has hardly moved the process forward and has, among other things, resulted in the postponement of elections, which unfortunately was blamed on a single person — President Kabila. The process has also suffered from the no-confidence crisis fuelled by suspicions instilled in the Congolese people, whereby they doubted themselves and became sceptical of the solemn promise made by the Head of State to respect the Constitution. My delegation believes that the international community, which bears its share of responsibility for that situation, must adopt measured and deliberate language to help dispel the crisis at the process' current stage. The results achieved by the Commission so far must motivate us to trust that institution and allow it to complete its task, while avoiding interference in its work for reasons that pertain more to speculation than reality. Constructive contributions aimed at improving the process are welcome. They must be done in mutual respect among partners.

Lastly, since the fulfilment of the promise made by the Head of State to respect the Constitution, the political situation in the country, as well as at the international level, is enjoying a period of respite. Our wish is to see the situation continue so as to allow, for the first time in the history of our country, a peaceful transition of power at the highest level of the Congolese State. From that perspective, the Congolese Government and people also are also counting on the United Nations, especially the Security Council, the mission of which is to ensure international peace and security.

*The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.*

United Nations S/PV.8332

# Security Council

Seventy-third year

*Provisional*

**8332**nd meeting

Tuesday, 28 August 2018, 9.30 a.m.

New York

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *President*: | Ms. Pierce | (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) |
| *Members*: | Bolivia (Plurinational State of) | Mrs. Cordova Soria |
| | China | Mr. Yao Shaojun |
| | Côte d'Ivoire | Mr. Adom |
| | Equatorial Guinea | Mr. Esono Mbengono |
| | Ethiopia | Ms. Guadey |
| | France | Mrs. Gueguen |
| | Kazakhstan | Mr. Umarov |
| | Kuwait | Mr. Alotaibi |
| | Netherlands | Mr. Van Oosterom |
| | Peru | Mr. Meza-Cuadra |
| | Poland | Ms. Wronecka |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Nebenzia |
| | Sweden | Mr. Orrenius Skau |
| | United States of America | Ms. Eckels-Currie |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/777)

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*The meeting was called to order at 9.35 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in the Middle East**

**Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/777)**

**The President**: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. John Ging, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/777, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018).

I now give the floor to Mr. Ging.

**Mr. Ging**: Last month, the Emergency Relief Coordinator informed the Security Council (see S/PV.8320) of the dramatic increase in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Aleppo and Idlib governorates since the beginning of the year. Recent weeks have seen a further serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the north-west, with intense aerial bombardment and shelling reported in parts of Idlib, Aleppo, Hama and Latakia governorates, resulting in the death and injury of civilians and damage to, and the destruction of, civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, thereby placing even more strain on humanitarian responders and vulnerable host communities.

On 10 August, there were air strikes on the town of Oram Al-Kubra, in western Aleppo, which were reported to have killed 41 civilians and wounded more than 70. On the same day, bombs were dropped on Alteh and Khan Shaykhun, in southern Idlib, killing 12 civilians and wounding dozens of others. On 12 August, 67 people were reportedly killed and 37 were injured, including many women and children, when a weapons depot in a residential building exploded near Sarmada, in rural Idlib.

Over the same period, the United Nations Children's Fund reported that three health facilities it had been supporting were attacked, rendering two of those facilities out of service. Separately, an unconfirmed report was received of a projectile striking the grounds of a hospital in Al-Ma'arra which had been deconflicted according to agreed procedures. In that instance, no casualties or damage to the hospital were reported. School activities were also suspended in several areas owing to hostilities.

Humanitarian organizations are responding to needs across the north-west while drawing on cross-border assistance deliveries, which continue to provide a critical lifeline for hundreds of thousands of civilians who cannot be reached through other means. Some 680,000 people received food delivered from Turkey during the month of July alone, while 254,000 people received health assistance during the same period.

Alongside the ongoing response and prepositioning of aid, humanitarian partners are finalizing a comprehensive readiness plan for people in areas of the north-west being reached by cross-border humanitarian organizations. The plan is intended to guide a flexible response over a six-month period, complementing assistance mobilized from inside Syria. With an estimated 2.1 million people already in need in areas under non-State armed group control covered by the readiness plan, with humanitarian workers likely to be among the displaced and with many organizations facing increasing funding shortfalls, the efforts of the Council to avoid a further escalation of violence and an ensuing humanitarian catastrophe are critical.

Turning to the situation in the south-west, the Government of Syria has now regained control over the vast majority of Dara'a, Quneitra and Al-Suwayda governorates. Large-scale return of internally displaced people has already taken place, and fewer than 60,000 people are now estimated to remain displaced across the three governorates.

However, massive levels of humanitarian need persist, and the United Nations continues to provide

aid in partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other local organizations. Food assistance has now been provided to more than 390,000 people, as have water and sanitation, education, shelter assistance and protection services. Two ad hoc inter-agency convoys delivered hygiene kits, nutrition supplies and sanitary and household items for a total of 40,000 people in Dara'a's Al-Balad and Busra Al-Sham on 9 and 16 August, respectively. As efforts to scale up protection and basic services continue and more detailed needs assessments are also under way, sustained and expanded humanitarian access across the south-west will be critical.

The humanitarian situation remains complex and challenging in other parts of the country. At Rukban, on the Syrian-Jordanian border, the movement of several hundred families out of the camp due to deteriorating living conditions means that the current population is estimated to be approximately 45,000, of whom the vast majority are women and children. The provision of humanitarian assistance in the camp is increasingly urgent, with minimal aid delivered since January. Discussions on a humanitarian convoy to the area continue.

Close to 150,000 people are now estimated to have returned to Raqqa city. Unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices continue to pose a life-threatening threat to returnees and humanitarian personnel. Alongside the insecurity and resource shortfalls, this is hindering the scaling-up of assistance.

In Deir ez-Zor, ongoing fighting in the east of the governorate has continued to impact civilians, with reports of more than 20,000 people having been displaced to makeshift camps between July and the beginning of this month. Many sites hosting new arrivals are not accessible to humanitarian organizations present in the area, and most displaced people are reported to be prevented from leaving the sites, although some have been able to move to other areas to receive medical treatment.

The number of people who remain displaced from eastern Ghouta in sites in rural Damascus is reported to have fallen to just below 7,500. The United Nations did not receive authorization to access these sites between mid-June and August. However, the goods news is that visits to some of those locations were possible last week. Returns to eastern Ghouta are reported to have continued, although access to the area remains limited, delaying our efforts to scale up assistance and provide much-needed services in the area, including for returnees.

World Humanitarian Day was held on 19 August to pay tribute to aid workers and rally support for people affected by crises around the world. Syria remains among the most dangerous countries in the world for humanitarian workers and health-care providers. Many have been directly targeted in the course of their work or forced to flee their homes. Hundreds have lost their lives. We continue to remind all parties to the fighting in Syria of their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect and respect humanitarian relief personnel.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator is in Damascus today to engage with the Government of Syria on how best to further scale up the collective humanitarian response across Syria and how to ensure that those in greatest need are assisted and protected. His visit coincides with a visit of the High Commissioner for Refugees.

The Council's engagement is also critical to ensuring de-escalation in Idlib and surrounding areas; to ensure safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access; and to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Hundreds of thousands of people are already experiencing dire humanitarian conditions in overcrowded sites in which basic services have been stretched to the breaking point for months.

Humanitarian organizations are doing what they can with the resources available to them to sustain the current response and prepare for a possible further deterioration, thanks in large part to cross-border assistance and the generosity of our financial donors. But a worst-case scenario in Idlib would overwhelm capacities and have the potential to create a humanitarian emergency at a scale not yet seen in this crisis. We therefore call on the members of the Council to do all they can to ensure that we avoid that. In the words of Kofi Annan, "We have the means and the capacity to deal with our problems, if only we can find the political will."

**The President**: I thank Mr. Ging for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

**Mr. Orrenius Skau** (Sweden): Speaking on behalf of the humanitarian penholders, I thank Mr. Ging for

his briefing and I pay tribute to the tireless efforts of humanitarian workers saving lives on the ground in Syria every day. Too many brave humanitarians have been killed on duty.

We meet today as there are alarming signs of a pending military offensive in north-western Syria. Over the past two weeks, we have already witnessed attacks on educational and health-care facilities, including three schools supported by UNICEF. In the first half of 2018, there were 38 reported attacks against health facilities in Idlib. These are clear violations of international humanitarian law.

All parties, including Syrian allies, need to be reminded of their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian objects and comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and the avoidance of unnecessary suffering. Civilian areas, buildings dedicated to education, including schools, and hospitals and medical facilities must not be subject to direct attack or used for military purposes, and humanitarian and medical personnel must be respected and protected.

We note with deep regret the continued lack of implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), presented by Sweden and Kuwait and adopted unanimously by the Council some six months ago (see S/PV.8188). We stress that Security Council resolutions must be respected.

Idlib is a de-escalation area, established by the Astana guarantors. One after the other of the de-escalation areas has turned into escalation areas. Of the estimated 2.9 million people living in Idlib and surrounding areas, more than half of the population are internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom have already fled not only once, but several times, including from other de-escalation areas. A staggering 2.1 million people in Idlib and surrounding areas are in need of humanitarian assistance. Increased military escalation would have catastrophic consequences and could lead to a humanitarian disaster. We therefore urge all parties to abide by the de-escalation agreement in Idlib and call upon the Astana guarantors to uphold their commitments regarding de-escalation and humanitarian access. We must ensure that Idlib will not become the next Aleppo or eastern Ghouta.

We remain deeply concerned by the continued lack of humanitarian access. In the last reporting period, only four inter-agency convoys were dispatched. The Syrian authorities must be compelled to do more. We encourage those with influence and those who engage in dialogue with Damascus to step up advocacy for the signing of facilitation letters for convoys, United Nations regular programming to all areas, including areas that have recently changed control, and approval of visas for United Nations staff, including those of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We also note that the cross-border modality remains an absolute lifeline for the many people in need in Idlib, and commend the efforts of the United Nations and partner organizations in that regard.

In Syria, horrible war crimes continue to be perpetrated on a daily basis. Civilians, women and men alike, as well as children, continue to be targeted in blatant disregard for human life and dignity and in violation of international law. In the military operations to retake control of the south-west, indiscriminate aerial bombardment and artillery shelling, including against schools and hospitals, have frequently been used. We are also shocked by the attacks perpetrated by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Suwayda on 25 July, such as the abduction of women and children. This highlights yet again the need for accountability, and we reiterate our full support for the Commission of Inquiry, as well as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

All displaced Syrians have the right to return, but the assessment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is that conditions for the voluntary repatriation of Syrian refugees are not yet in place. It is the responsibility of the Syrian authorities to create an environment propitious for a safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and IDPs, in accordance with international law and the principle of non-refoulement. UNHCR has a clear mandate to protect refugees. The return of refugees and IDPs must be managed by the United Nations with all relevant parties, in line with international humanitarian law. We fully support the work of the United Nations, including UNCHR, and agree with its assessment. In this regard, we also express our continued concern regarding the Syrian Law No. 10.

Finally, we reiterate our support for a United Nations-facilitated political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). That is the only way to ensure a sustainable solution to the crisis in Syria, to end the

suffering and to address the legitimate concerns of all Syrians. Furthermore, only once a credible political transition is firmly under way and when conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and IDPs are in place will the international donor community be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria.

To conclude, let me emphasize that Sweden and Kuwait have been significant donors to the Syria humanitarian response over the years and we will continue to contribute. As co-penholders, we will also continue to do our utmost to help alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, remind the Syrian parties of their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, and ensure that the Council upholds its responsibility in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

**Mr. Meza-Cuadra** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the holding of this meeting and thank Mr. John Ging for his valuable and informative briefing this morning.

Peru is following the situation in Syria with great concern. The conflict continues to claim lives and destroy civilian infrastructure. The sorely needed humanitarian assistance is still delivered only in a limited way. More than 13 million people — two out of three Syrians — need it. Our main focus at the moment is Idlib, a highly volatile scenario. The extreme vulnerability of nearly 4 million civilians should compel us to direct our attention to the need and responsibility to protect them. Under no circumstances can the fight against terrorism be used as an excuse to violate human rights and international humanitarian law, especially when, as in Idlib, the lives of approximately 2 million children are at stake.

It is essential to prevent a further escalation of violence. Its humanitarian impact is incalculable. It could lead to massive new refugee flows and further complicate regional stability. We are also concerned about the situation of nearly 5 million internally displaced persons and the 6 million Syrian citizens, who constitute the largest population of refugees and displaced persons in the world today. These people, who are in many cases exposed to the most precarious living conditions, have the right to return voluntarily to their homes and businesses, in a safe and dignified manner, under internationally accepted parameters. The right of ownership of these persons must not be undermined in any way.

More than ever, the tragic situation demands that the United Nations and other humanitarian actors have immediate, safe and unrestricted access to those most in need. We wish to reiterate our admiration of, and support for, the work of humanitarian workers. We also stress the importance of cross-border assistance for the survival of millions of people. The international community, and in particular the countries with the greatest resources and those committed to peace and stability, must ensure stable and predictable funding for the humanitarian response plan in Syria.

Finally, we must bear in mind the urgency of a political solution to this protracted conflict, based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). All parties, especially the Government, must engage constructively in those efforts. Our ability to ease the suffering of the population and to ensure the necessary and urgent rebuilding of the country ultimately depend upon it. In that regard, we hope that the upcoming meeting in Geneva between the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and the Astana guarantors will enable progress in establishing a constitutional committee that is inclusive and representative, especially with regard to Syrian women. We believe it is essential that the Astana guarantors, other countries with influence over the Syrian Government, and the opposition contribute to an atmosphere of moderation, détente, dialogue in order to ensure peace, the well-being of the people of Syria and the territorial integrity of the country.

**Ms. Eckels-Currie** (United States of America): I thank Mr. John Ging for his briefing.

All eyes are now on north-western Syria, and we are gravely concerned about the threats to civilian lives should the regime and its allies undertake a wider offensive in Idlib province. Tensions are rising there, and so is the violence. In recent weeks alone, hundreds of civilians have already lost their lives, many of them women and children. Education authorities reportedly have suspended all school activities for several days in cities near Idlib due to hostilities. Syrian regime military operations in Idlib, particularly with Russian military support, would escalate the conflict and further undercut the Security Council's efforts to work towards a political solution to the conflict.

We are also profoundly troubled by reports that the regime is continuing its practice of targeting medical facilities, an egregious and ruthless tactic flagrantly in defiance of international humanitarian law and specifically in violation of resolution 2286 (2016). There is no excuse to claim ignorance about the locations of those facilities under the deconfliction mechanisms that are in place. Doing so only adds to the lies, crimes and countless accounts of human tragedy that have defined this conflict over the past seven years.

The United States takes seriously the warnings from Special Envoy of the Secretary-General De Mistura and the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator that a military operation in Idlib and surrounding areas would not only endanger the lives of many of the more than 3 million civilians sheltering there, but would also severely interfere with humanitarian partners' ability to deliver lifesaving assistance. Unless the Astana guarantors — Russia, Iran and Turkey — uphold their own established de-escalation zone in Idlib province to stop the regime's imminent assault, those civilians will have nowhere left to turn to seek safe refuge or aid.

The United States is also deeply concerned that the regime may again use chemical weapons against civilian populations as part of its assault on Idlib, with devastating consequences for humanitarian conditions on the ground and further eroding the international regime prohibiting the use of chemical weapons. As we made clear in our joint statement to commemorate the anniversary of the regime's deadly sarin gas attack in Ghouta, the United States and our allies, France and the United Kingdom, will respond appropriately to any new chemical-weapon attacks by the Al-Assad regime.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees assesses that conditions in Syria are not yet conducive for large-scale refugee returns. Despite the assessment of the United Nations, however, the Al-Assad regime has called on Syrians around the world to return home, but has done little to create the conditions necessary to make that a reality. In fact, the regime continues to make the country a threatening and dangerous place for its own people by routinely blocking United Nations cross-border humanitarian access, stalling the United Nations-led political process in Geneva and proceeding with air strikes and ground offensives — placing millions of civilians in peril.

As the leading donor of humanitarian assistance for Syria, the United States supports aid that reaches 4 million Syrians across all 14 governorates every month, and we will continue to provide that support to the Syrian people. If our Russian partners are serious about their concern for refugees and other displaced Syrians, we recommend that they stop enabling the Syrian regime's ongoing and indiscriminate violence, maintain the de-escalation areas and allow unhindered humanitarian access to those in need, in full accordance with resolution 2165 (2014).

The best and only durable solution to the humanitarian crisis in Syria is through a credible political process in Geneva that leads unalterably to constitutional reform, United Nations-supervised presidential and parliamentary elections and a political transition that genuinely reflects the will of the Syrian people, as well as accountability for human rights abuses committed during the conflict. Those goals often seem out of reach, but we owe it to the Syrian people to support every effort to make them a reality.

**Mrs. Cordova Soria** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We very much appreciate and take note of the briefing by the Director of Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. John Ging.

We once again express our dismay that the people of Syria continues to live under siege and in violence, primarily the most vulnerable population, children, who in some cases have known only that reality their whole lives. We regret that, at the time of the presentation of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/777), as a result of the conflict approximately 1.48 million people were still living in hard-to-reach areas, and that among the more than 6 million internally displaced persons 2.6 million are children. We also regret that in July alone, in the south-west of Syria, up to 325,000 were displaced, thereby increasing the number of displaced persons of this already vulnerable population.

In that regard, we renew our appeal to the relevant parties and call for the cessation of hostilities in the context of resolution 2401 (2018). Any increase in tensions must be prevented so as not to cause greater instability in the region. We therefore reiterate our concern and alarm about what may happen not only in Aleppo province, but particularly in Idlib, since any use of force in that region can lead to, apart from mass population displacement, a greater humanitarian

catastrophe. We therefore draw attention to the fact that, in the month of July alone, the population in Idlib increased to 4.2 million people.

It is essential to avoid any kind of tension or escalation of violence in order to prevent a greater tragedy. To that end, the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) is crucial. In that regard, we highlight the various initiatives that made it possible to reach local agreements that facilitated not only the delivery of humanitarian assistance but also the evacuation of people in need, such as the populations of Fo'ah and Kafraya on 16 July.

Likewise, we highlight the delivery of supplies by France, which were transported to Syria with the support of the Russian Federation. That example should be repeated if we hope to reach the 13.1 million people who need assistance throughout Syrian territory. We are convinced that dialogue and cooperation are more effective than the use of violence.

We once again condemn any kind of indiscriminate attack on civilian installations. We call on the parties to respect their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law in order to ensure the protection of civilians, hospitals and educational facilities and not make such civilian infrastructure the target of their attacks, but particularly to have regard for and to protect medical and humanitarian personnel. We believe that only respect for international law and international humanitarian law will make it possible achieve a gradual sustainable peace in Syria.

We pay heartfelt tribute to humanitarian and medical personnel, whose tireless work, including risking their own lives, has enabled the much-needed humanitarian access. We urge the various humanitarian agencies not to stop such assistance, since, thanks to them, it has been possible to reach more than 3.3 million people with food and 1 million people with water, sanitation and hygiene services and supplies. In that regard, we emphasize that, in the month of July alone, more than 188,000 children and mothers received primary health-care and immunization services, while more than 193,000 children and nursing mothers received nutritional supplements and services. However, we particularly emphasize that it has been possible to provide protection and psychosocial support services to more than 209,000 children.

That is why we reiterate the need for cooperation on the part of the Syrian Government so that, working in a more coordinated and active way with the various United Nations agencies and their representatives, such assistance can be increased. That also urgently requires visa approvals, as well as authorization for the entry of convoys. We therefore highlight the dispatch of at least four cross-border convoys during the month of July. We urge that the delivery of humanitarian assistance through such inter-agency humanitarian convoys continue.

We insist on the need to ensure the clearing of explosive remnants of war throughout the territory and populated areas, in particular in Raqqa city. We believe that to be an urgent and essential task, not only since they threaten humanitarian activities but also because the necessary measures must be taken to prevent fatalities among medical staff, humanitarian workers and, in particular, civilians returning to their cities of origin. In that regard, we recall the fact that any return must be voluntary, unhindered, in full dignity and in safe conditions.

Finally, we reiterate that the only way to resolve the conflict is through an inclusive, negotiated and agreed political process, led by and for the Syrian people and which facilitates a peaceful solution.

**Ms. Wronecka** (Poland): At the outset, allow me to thank our briefer, Mr. John Ging, for his comprehensive analysis.

First, let me very briefly underline once again our strong support for the relaunching of a United Nations-facilitated political process for Syria. We strongly support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned inclusive political process under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva.

Switching now to our main topic, namely, the humanitarian dimension of the Syrian conflict, we have to acknowledge that the military logic continues to drive developments in Syria. We still face unceasing and widespread violence and violations of international law, including gross and systematic human rights violations and abuses. The most striking examples of that are still visible in the south-western part of Syria. We are extremely worried by reports stating that by the end of this month, almost 200,000 people may be newly displaced in affected areas.

Taking into consideration the recent events, we strongly condemn the intensification of military operations and call for an immediate end to the violence

in south-western Syria. Military operations resulting in deaths among the civilian population, as well as the destruction of and damage to civilian infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, are unacceptable and must stop. Safe and sustainable humanitarian access must be secured. Unfortunately, since the Syrian Government retook control of many areas of the country, there is still no unhindered access for humanitarian actors to the areas in need.

We are concerned about not only south-western Syria but also the north-western part. Military operations led by Government forces, with the support of its allies, have already displaced thousands of civilians. The total number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Aleppo and Idlib governorates has increased by more than half a million this year.

As we heard in the briefing, Idlib governorate is still struggling with the new, significant influx of internally displaced persons. It is an extremely worrying pattern, which leaves Idlib with the highest total number of displaced persons in Syria. More than half a million people have been displaced to and within Idlib governorate in the past six months, mostly from eastern Ghouta, Homs, Yarmouk and other parts of Idlib governorate. Possible consequences of further military escalation in that area are of great concern to us.

The humanitarian imperative should be our priority. We would like to reiterate our strong call to all parties with some influence on the ground to take all the necessary actions to achieve a full cessation of hostilities in the whole territory of Syria, in particular in Idlib, in order to prevent scenarios already witnessed in eastern Ghouta and Aleppo. In that context, it should be emphasized that the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure by all sides to the conflict should be respected.

Let me also stress the need for the protection for refugees. We would support only the safe, voluntary and dignified return of the Syrian people under a United Nations-led framework once conditions allow it. Respect for the imperative of non-refoulement should be our guiding principle in that matter.

There is no need to repeat the importance of the protection of groups in situations of vulnerability, especially children, women and members of religious minorities, who are far too often disproportionally affected by the conflict in Syria.

In conclusion, allow me to stress the necessity of maintaining the unity of the Security Council on the question of the full implementation of a humanitarian resolution across Syria. Unfortunately, we see a new military offensive persisting. That worries us, as we may again witness increased violence. We call on all parties that can affect events on the ground to take the steps necessary to ensure the cessation of hostilities, the adequate protection of the Syrian people and, finally, the provision of urgent humanitarian access.

**Mrs. Gueguen** (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, we would like to thank the Director of Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. John Ging, for his briefing, which once again highlighted the grave humanitarian situation in Syria and the risk of further deterioration if the regime launches a large-scale offensive in Idlib. It should be recalled that violence begets violence and that deadly cycle must cease. In that regard, I would like to make four points.

First, France is very concerned about the signs of a large-scale military offensive in Idlib. Such military action continues to undermine hopes for an end to the crisis and could spark another humanitarian tragedy in northern Syria, coupled with a migrant crisis in Turkey. The protection of civilians and infrastructure must be guaranteed, as the lives of 2.2 million people are at stake. Such violence would also exacerbate threats to regional security as it would cause jihadist combatants, including those in the Idlib region, to disperse. The increased bombings of recent weeks must cease immediately. Together, we must dissuade the Syrian regime from carrying out its strategy of crushing opposition and, in particular, using chemical weapons. That is the message France, along with its American and British partners, conveyed last week. In that regard, maintaining dialogue is essential and President Emmanuel Macron is in close contact with President Erdoğan and President Putin on that issue. We call on the guarantors of the Idlib de-escalation area to maintain the ceasefire and to fully respect and ensure respect for humanitarian law.

Secondly, more broadly, full, immediate and unhindered access must be guaranteed throughout Syria. Humanitarian workers must have safe access to all those in need, including in eastern Ghouta and Quneitra. France deplores the fact that no genuine progress has been achieved in that area, including in priority zones where control has changed hands. Only

11 per cent of convoy needs identified by the United Nations have been covered in July and August, which is insufficient and unacceptable. We recall that assistance provided by the cross-border convoys authorized by resolution 2393 (2017) is crucial. The assistance provided via Turkey is vital and no alternative exists for providing daily assistance to approximately 2 million people in north-western Syria. We also call for increased aid through Al-Yarubiyeh, between Iraq and Syria.

Thirdly, with regard to the return of refugees, at present conditions for their safe, dignified and voluntary return regrettably do not exist. If they should decide to return to Syria, their safety cannot be guaranteed. Since January, there have been nearly 1 million additional internally displaced persons. Those who return are vulnerable to expropriation, abuses, forced recruitment and even persecution by the regime. Law No. 10 makes the displacement of people irreversible and is part of a demographic engineering strategy. It is a major hindrance to the return of refugees and displaced people. Like our European Union partners collectively, we request a repeal of the law, reparations and in-depth work on the restitution of property and conscription.

Fourthly and lastly, I recall that the humanitarian situation will enjoy no long-term improvement without credible and irreversible progress in a United Nations-led political process. To date, the Syrian regime has demonstrated no willingness to negotiate a political transition. Without a political transition, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), national reconciliation will not take place and the majority of refugees will not return. We also recall very explicitly that without a genuine political transition, the States members and institutions of the European Union will not fund reconstruction.

In conclusion, we are at a crossroads on the path to a serious process that will lead to an inclusive political solution. France is working to bring together the parties to the conflict. The announcement by Mr. Staffan de Mistura on the formation of a constitutional committee is an opportunity we must take to ensure progress towards a political solution. France will continue its efforts to protect Syrian civilians and to ensure that the political process leads to genuine constitutional change and free, transparent and inclusive elections.

**Mr. Van Oosterom** (Netherlands): First, let me express appreciation to Mr. Ging for his sobering briefing.

I will focus on three points today: the need to uphold international humanitarian law, in particular in Idlib; the conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees; and the need for a political process.

First, with regard to international humanitarian law and Idlib, we have continued to witness the consequences of intensified military action in Syria, especially last month in the south-west. Cross-border aid is needed to fulfil humanitarian needs in that area; sporadic deliveries from Damascus are not sufficient. We underline the need to uphold international humanitarian law and protect civilians, including aid workers and medical personnel. Even when hospitals provide their coordinates to receive protection, they are targeted from the air. Such practices reflect shocking disrespect for international law and human dignity and decency. The parties to the conflict should provide protection to all civilians, especially to those fleeing violence.

We share the concerns expressed in the Secretary General's report (S/2018/777) with regard to further military escalation in the north-west. Nearly 3 million civilians, including 1 million children, live in Idlib. Sixty per cent of them are internally displaced persons who have fled violence elsewhere in Syria and sought protection in the north-west. The Astana guarantors of the de-escalation area should provide such protection; that is their obligation under international humanitarian law. We urge the Syrian regime and the Astana guarantors to prevent an escalation of violence in Idlib. The Astana guarantors and the Syrian regime have to work towards a non-violent negotiated solution. Upcoming meetings, such as the Istanbul conference, should be used to find the solution. Parties need to refrain from military action.

Secondly, with regard to conditions for the safe return of refugees, Syrians — totalling approximately 5.6 million people — remain the largest group of refugees worldwide. We remain grateful to neighbouring countries for their hospitality and stress the importance of international support and solidarity. We appreciate the recent agreement on the humanitarian response plan, although it is long overdue. Like our Peruvian colleague, I would also highlight the dire plight of so many internally displaced persons. Once again, we stress the importance of a needs-based humanitarian approach in Syria, not just now but also in the coming year.

We are shocked by the recent publication of the death records of hundreds of Syrians who died in the regime's detention centres. We cannot talk about the safe return of refugees so long as the regime is not even prepared to protect its own citizens throughout Syria. It remains unsafe to return to Syria. The 21 protection thresholds, as defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and which we strongly support, are not in place. For any voluntary return, a safe political, social and economic environment needs to be ensured to enable refugees to return to their towns and villages and re-establish themselves in safety and dignity. In line with the principle of non-refoulement, guaranteeing voluntary returns is at the core of such a process. It is crucial that UNHCR and other protection actors have access to monitor compliance with the 21 protection thresholds.

Related to that issue, we still have serious concerns about Syrian Law No. 10. That law seems to attempt to construct new demographic realities on the ground and challenges the future of refugees and internally displaced persons alike.

Thirdly, a political solution is needed. The pursuit of a strategy based on military violence and the violation of civil rights will never bring long-term stability and peace. Syrians need to see that they can trust their own Government to bring peace. Ultimately, stability and peace can be created only through an inclusive political solution. The position of the Kingdom of the Netherlands is clear and consistent. We support a United Nations-facilitated political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). There will be no reconstruction support for Syria as long as a political transition has not taken place.

In conclusion, let me echo the call from the Secretary-General's report:

> "[T]he perpetrators of serious violations of international humanitarian law must be held accountable. Such a step is central to achieving sustainable peace in the Syrian Arab Republic." (*S/2018/777, para. 45*)

In line with the Secretary-General, we call for the situation in the country to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

Let me end with a word of respect and appreciation for aid workers and medical personnel who risk their own lives for the victims of the violence in Syria.

**Mr. Adom** (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes this briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria. I thank Mr. John Ging, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, whose briefing informed us about the continuing humanitarian challenges, linked in particular to the ongoing hostilities between the parties to the conflict in Syria. In that regard, the warning of an imminent Syrian offensive against Idlib only increases our concern.

Despite the unanimous adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2401 (2018), the long-awaited stable humanitarian pause, indispensable for the delivery of humanitarian aid, including medical evacuations, is unfortunately struggling to materialize. I recall that the resolution called on all parties to cease hostilities in order to create the conditions necessary for unrestricted and sustainable access by United Nations humanitarian convoys to the besieged areas in order to put an end to the plight of millions of Syrians.

Unfortunately, despite the Council's urgent appeals, military clashes are still ongoing, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/777), and the escalation of violence spares neither schools nor hospitals. They are contributing thereby to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria. In the north-west of the country, the report states that the total number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib has increased by more than 570,000 since early 2018, reaching a total of 4.2 million. Thousands of evacuees from the south-west have been transported to Idlib — a town that recorded the arrival of nearly 130,000 displaced people between March and August. The worrisome deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria is further exacerbated by the difficulties encountered by humanitarian actors in assisting populations in distress.

In that particularly difficult environment, where humanitarian actors are risking their lives to restore hope to millions of Syrians, Côte d'Ivoire would like to commend the courageous actions taken for the return of some 147,000 civilians to Raqqa city since the end of hostilities in October 2017, despite the spread of explosive remnants of war in that city. My country also welcomes the continued cross-border delivery of humanitarian assistance by the United Nations and its specialized agencies, which has helped more than 3.3 million people in need.

In view of the deteriorating humanitarian situation, Côte d'Ivoire recalls that it is incumbent on the warring parties in the Syrian crisis to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It urges them in particular to refrain from impeding the delivery of humanitarian aid. It endorses the Secretary-General's appeal to all parties to the conflict, Syrian civil society and all other actors to cooperate fully with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic, with a view to conducting the necessary investigations and bringing to justice before international courts those who have committed serious crimes under international law since March 2011.

The lack of consensus in the Council on the Syrian issue further exacerbates the impasse in the political process and jeopardizes the chances of a negotiated way out of the Syrian conflict. In that context, the joint humanitarian operation conducted by Russia and France appears to us to be a model of cooperation that should be welcomed and repeated. That project enabled the supply of essential medical equipment to 500 seriously wounded and 15,000 lightly wounded persons in eastern Ghouta. My delegation therefore urges the members of the Council to consider all forms of cooperation in support of the fundamental right of the Syrian people to health, education and well-being.

Côte d'Ivoire encourages Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the political process in Syria, to spare no effort to maintain the momentum of consultations with a view to achieving further progress in the implementation of the Sochi final statement and the establishment of a Syrian-led constitutional committee, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the informal consultations of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General with high-level representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey at the Astana process meeting in Sochi on 30 and 31 July. My country remains convinced that the just and lasting peace that our Council wishes to see in Syria must be the outcome of a political process based on inclusive and constructive dialogue.

**Mr. Esono Mbengono** (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to Mr. John Ging, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), for his informative briefing. We once again commend the OCHA teams for their tireless efforts to alleviate the suffering of millions of Syrian civilians.

Equatorial Guinea joins previous delegations in expressing its deep concern over the ongoing hostilities in several provinces in the south-west and north-west of Syria. We condemn the terrible attacks of recent weeks in various parts of the country on civilians and civilian and humanitarian infrastructure in north-western Syria, which have claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians, many of them women and children, in the provinces of Idlib and Aleppo.

The civilian population should not and must not continue to be the victim and target of military operations. In that regard, we call on all parties and those with influence over them to ensure safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian assistance to civilians and the protection of civilian infrastructure, in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Syria is one of the most challenging and dangerous environments for humanitarian workers. Since the onset of the crisis in March 2011, hundreds of humanitarian workers and service providers, including health workers, are estimated to have been killed in the line of duty. It is therefore urgent that all necessary measures be taken to increase their protection and ensure the continuity of services in support of an effective humanitarian response to people in need.

In Idlib and surrounding areas, the threat of an escalation of violence, similar to that seen in other parts of Syria, will not only endanger many of the more than 3 million civilians surviving in that densely populated area, but will also seriously affect the ability of humanitarian partners to deliver life-saving assistance, and will ultimately become a genuine source of destabilization for the region.

As we have reiterated, the humanitarian situation cannot be addressed in isolation from the political process. In that regard, it is essential that all parties to the conflict and those with influence over them reach a genuine and inclusive agreement so as to resolve this protracted war peacefully and to avoid further suffering of the Syrian people. We also reiterate our firm commitment to the inclusive political process

under the auspices of the United Nations, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015).

Lastly, we hope that the talks scheduled for early September in Geneva with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General will create the conditions necessary to achieve a lasting solution to the conflict, which will lead inevitably to the country's needed reconstruction and breathe new life into its economy thanks to the financial contributions of its strategic partners.

**Ms. Guadey** (Ethiopia): We thank Director John Ging for his briefing. We reiterate our appreciation to the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for continuing to provide life-saving assistance to millions of Syrians in challenging circumstances.

We note from the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/777) that the United Nations no longer categorizes any area in Syria as besieged. In addition, the number of displaced people has decreased significantly, particularly in south-west Syria. While the return of refugees and internally displaced persons in some parts of Syria could be taken as a positive trend, we understand that humanitarian needs remain at a high level. Therefore, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners should be supported by all parties so that they can reach all Syrians in need of assistance.

In that regard, we stress that safe, timely, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to people in need throughout the country remains indispensable. The protection of civilians and civilian facilities is also critical. In addition to supporting an effective humanitarian response, the protection of aid workers should be afforded special attention. In order to continue need-based humanitarian programmes, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners also require sufficient and predictable funding for the Syria humanitarian assistance response plan.

We are concerned that further military escalation in Idlib and surrounding areas, where nearly 3 million Syrians reside, could aggravate the humanitarian crisis. The report of the Secretary-General clearly cautions that increased military escalation in that area would not only trigger further massive population movements, but also have catastrophic consequences for civilians in terms of protection and access to humanitarian assistance and basic services. As Idlib is one of the de-escalation zones, we encourage the Astana guarantors — who, we acknowledge, had a meeting late last month — to abide by the de-escalation agreement and find a sustainable solution through dialogue that could protect civilians in that area.

The Council — particularly those members that have influence over local actors — should also play a constructive role in avoiding military measures that could have a huge impact on civilians. As the Secretary-General reminds us in his latest report, we all should have only one agenda — to end the continued and enormous suffering of the people of Syria. It is only a Syrian-owned, comprehensive and political solution facilitated by the United Nations that could sustainably end the humanitarian tragedy. Therefore, all efforts should be made to accelerate progress on the political track.

**Mr. Alotaibi** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we thank Mr. John Ging for his valuable briefing and we commend the efforts made by all humanitarian workers in Syria and elsewhere in the world. On behalf of the State of Kuwait, I would also like to endorse statement delivered by the representative of Sweden. However, I have additional points that I would like to briefly address.

The province of Idlib, which is inhabited by nearly 3 million people, is in the spotlight as a result of various reports pointing to a potential military escalation there. Any escalation would undoubtedly exacerbate the ongoing humanitarian crisis, and we urge everybody to abide by the de-escalation agreement. The military option in Idlib would have disastrous humanitarian consequences, especially in light of the fact that half of its population is made up of internally displaced persons. In addition, millions of people in Idlib and the neighbouring areas are in need of humanitarian assistance. Diplomatic efforts must therefore be stepped up by all actors at the highest level to avoid bloody battle and further bloodshed, so as to prevent the recurrence of the disasters that occurred in Aleppo and eastern Ghouta.

We are convinced that the cross-border assistance mechanism constitutes a vital part of the humanitarian assistance in Syria, where millions rely on that machinery, which was able to deliver humanitarian assistance to more than 600,000 people in July. That bears witness to its effectiveness and importance and to the need to renew its mandate in due time.

Millions of Syrians have been displaced during the past few years as a result of the war and the deliberate destruction of residential areas and vital infrastructure

such as roads, hospitals and schools, as well as violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. All Syrian refugees have the right to go back to their homes, and we reiterate what we have said previously and what the Secretary-General of the United Nations has said in his monthly report about the need for safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees to their homes.

The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, is currently visiting Syria, and we hope to see more cooperation from the Syrian authorities with the United Nations and its specialized humanitarian agencies by allowing unhindered and effective humanitarian access to help all people in need in Syria. In that context, we recall that six months ago the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2401 (2018), calling for an immediate ceasefire, the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of injured persons. Unfortunately, however, that resolution has not been effectively implemented on the ground. It is frustrating that resolutions that are not implemented are useless and cannot help innocent civilians. History will not forget the Security Council's inability to shoulder its responsibilities for putting an end to flagrant violations of human rights and international humanitarian law throughout the Syrian crisis and to ensure accountability.

In conclusion, we all need to step up our efforts to make further tangible progress on the issue of Syria. We hope that the high-level diplomacy which we have seen recently will lead to a comprehensive settlement, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). The settlement must be approved by all components of the Syrian people and meet their legitimate aspirations, while preserving the unity, independence and sovereignty of Syria.

**Mr. Yao Shaojun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Director John Ging for his briefing. We have taken note of the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/777) on the cross-border humanitarian assistance.

Currently, the Syrian humanitarian situation continues to face challenges. Parties in Syria must proceed while considering the future of the country and its people's welfare, abide by the Council's resolutions and resolve differences through dialogue and consultations so as to immediately alleviate the humanitarian situation. The United Nations and the international community must step up communication and cooperation with the Government and support all regions in need of assistance within Syrian territory. At the same time, humanitarian assistance in Syria must be fully consistent with the principles of neutrality, impartiality and non-politicization, while based on respecting the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

We have also taken note of the reported ongoing returns of some Syrian refugees and displaced persons. People can be hopeful and long-term peace and stability in Syria can be fully guaranteed only when steady progress has been made in rebuilding the country. The international community must actively support Syrian reconstruction, including stepping up efforts to clear landmines, improvised explosive devices and other explosive remnants of war, in order to pave the way for the return of refugees and displaced persons.

Terrorist organizations continue to threaten the security of Syrian people. We must bolster the progress made in counter-terrorism and prevent the resurgence of terrorist organizations. The international community must consistently enhance its cooperation and resolutey combat all terrorist organizations on the Security Council's list so as to maintain regional stability and security.

We must step up efforts to promote a political settlement of the Syrian issue in order to fundamentally address the humanitarian situation in Syria. The international community must come together to support both the United Nations as the primary mediator and the efforts of Special Envoy De Mistura to advance the political process based on the principle of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process and resolution 2254 (2015). The Security Council must remain united on the Syrian humanitarian issue and provide conditions for a political settlement.

Ambassador Xie Xiaoyan, Special Envoy of the Chinese Government on the Syrian issue, visited Syria and countries of the region in late July. He held a further exchange of views with the parties concerned and played a constructive and active role in the political settlement of the Syrian issue.

China takes the humanitarian situation in Syria seriously and has been contributing to alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people. In May, China hosted a workshop on the development and rebuilding of Syria. In July, at the opening session of the eighth Ministerial

Meeting of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, President Xi Jinping announced that China would provide another ¥600 million to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and other countries for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction on the ground. China will continue to do its utmost to assist Syria and its neighbours that have been affected by the refugee issue.

**Mr. Umarov** (Kazakhstan): We thank Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. John Ging, for his briefing on the very critical humanitarian situation in Syria.

We have carefully studied the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions (S/2018/777). We are closely following developments on the ground and are aware of the dire humanitarian situation. Only by ensuring the safe, sustained and unimpeded access for the United Nations to people in need throughout the country, across conflict lines and in areas that have recently changed control will we be able to prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian crisis. We pay tribute to the United Nations system and its humanitarian partners for their work in the dangerous humanitarian operations in Syria, which are unprecedented in their magnitude and scale.

The political negotiation process is difficult but, as is said, diplomacy is the art of the possible. We must not lose hope that a political agreement between the parties to the conflict, as well as between the main players, will soon be achieved.

We welcome the outcomes of the international meeting in Sochi, held in the framework of the Astana talks, where all parties to the negotiations agreed to the basic postulates of peace, in particular creating the conditions to set up a constitutional committee in Geneva.

We consider the return of internally displaced persons to their homes and the return of Syrian refugees in neighbouring and European countries to their homeland as very pressing issues. We hope that the new constitutional committee for Syria, which is being established under United Nations auspices, will play an important role in that regard.

Supporting and maintaining the new momentum and creating new conditions for peace should be our priority, instead of saber rattling or undertaking military interventions, which could derail everything that has been achieved so far. Peace, not war, should be our dictum.

Lastly, Kazakhstan believes that Syria's State institutions should be preserved and helped to grow along democratic lines, with proper rule of law. The destruction of statehood or attempts to forcible change it will only add to the chaos, as we see with the consequences of nearly eight years of fighting. We also endorse the Secretary-General's call on all parties to ensure that all the necessary security guarantees are in place for the continued delivery of services to the south, which must be carried out in an impartial manner and without distinction.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Ging for his briefing.

The situation has stabilized in many areas in Syria. The authorities are creating the conditions for a dignified and safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons. The Syrian Government has called on its citizens to come home and participate in rebuilding the country after the devastating conflict. It has provided security and safety guarantees. Law Number 10, as Damascus has continued to explain, is not aimed at undermining property rights. A series of measures was developed to streamline passport and customs control, social and medical care, training and employment assistance, and preferential lending.

At the same time, with the support of Russian experts, there are efforts under way to demine, clear rubble and repair infrastructure. A total of 93 medical and 226 educational institutions have been restored; 318 kilometres of roads have been repaired; 242 kilometres of electrical transmission lines have been laid; 88 electricity substations have been made operational; and 72 water supply facilities, two oil wells and two fuel and energy complexes were commissioned. In 118 towns in the provinces of Aleppo, Damascus, Deir ez-Zor, Latakia, Hama and Homs, work is under way to restore 82 schools, 56 preschools, 58 bakeries, 59 pumping stations, 54 electricity substations, 50 medical facilities and more than 500 houses.

Russia has established a centre in Syria for receiving, processing and housing refugees in the country, which provides information about towns that are ready to receive people. The process of the return of Syrians to their homes is gaining momentum. In total, since September 2015, more than 238,000 refugees

have returned to Syria from abroad, as well as more than 1.2 million internally displaced persons. Starting in July this year, more than 9,000 refugees, first and foremost from Lebanon and Jordan, have returned. Reception centres have been established in 412 towns in order to place almost 1.5 million individuals.

It is clear that efforts to support Syrians in restoring damaged infrastructure must be stepped up. Making artificial demands that will only complicate that process is unacceptable. It is high time to heed United Nations assessments about the detrimental impact of unilateral sanctions on the lives of ordinary Syrians and to refrain from such inhumane measures.

The United Nations, especially the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, should play an important role in the process of the return of Syrians to their homes. So far that Office has adopted a fairly passive position, possibly because of an internal United Nations directive that was developed at the end of last year by the Department of Political Affairs without consulting with Member States. That directive does indeed exist, despite clumsy attempts to refute that fact. It impedes the involvement of United Nations agencies in efforts to rebuild Syria until political changes are in effect in that country. What does that remind us of? It is, word for word, the well-known politicized position of the key Western countries, which the Secretariat has, for some reason, adopted as the final word. This irresponsible approach, which runs counter to the neutral posture of the United Nations, must be immediately reviewed.

At the same time, we were surprised by the extent to which the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees expeditiously provided assistance to the White Helmet activists in Jordan who had been evacuated from Syrian territory by their sponsors. It would seem that ordinary Syrians who want to return home do not deserve assistance, whereas those who abet extremists by pretending to be humanitarian actors are welcomed with open arms. Such double standards undermine the credibility of our international Organization.

We agree that the situation in Idlib deserves close attention. The priority task continues to be separating the moderate opposition from the terrorists. In Idlib, we see concentrated forces of Jabhat al-Nusra that are attempting to lead and direct other groups, including those that are interested in national reconciliation. The terrorists have detained more than 2,000 "unreliable" individuals, who are suspected of wishing to reach an agreement with Syrian authorities.

We are seeing constant provocations against the Syrian Army and innocent civilians in areas abutting de-escalation zones. In August alone, the positions of the Government forces were shelled 383 times by mortars, anti-aircraft batteries and heavy-calibre machine guns. Twenty-one soldiers and 10 civilians were killed. The residential neighbourhoods of Aleppo have also been shelled. We have shot down 45 drones launched at the Khmeimim air base. Such drones are not limited to reconnaissance; they sometimes carry an explosive payload. Those practices will be countered.

We call on the commanders of illegal armed groups to refrain from provocations and to embark on the path of peaceful settlement. That option is still available. However, the current status quo is unacceptable. In violation of Syrian sovereignty, the United States has illegally set up the Al-Tanf military air base in the south of the country in the security zone where the Rukban refugee camp is located. There, hundreds of terrorists from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Jabhat al-Nusra feel quite safe and they carry out raids against liberated areas. Delivery of humanitarian aid to that camp has not yet been set up. We hope that this situation will be resolved.

Unfortunately, in the report of Secretary General (S/2018/777), the situation in the area around Rukban is not given adequate consideration. Furthermore, the essentially neocolonial policy to divide the country has continued, while in north-eastern Syria, with the support of the coalition, quasi-State structures that have pledged allegiance to the coalition have been established. We are seeing increasing numbers of military sites of the occupying Powers that are part of the coalition. There is clear evidence of a consolidated terrorist presence in the country that is attempting to secure control over the country's resources. That runs counter to statements that the only goal of the military presence is to combat ISIL.

The July meeting on the humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.8320 ) focused on the protection of children. Some delegations said all the right words about the priority tasks, including the psychological rehabilitation of children and ensuring normal conditions for their return to school. That was encouraging and we began to ask colleagues what steps they intended to

take in order to help Syrian children. To our surprise, it seemed that they had no such plans. In other words, the goal was simply to draw attention to the issue. Making noise and making a show of appearing humane to the audience is not necessary. The Syrians understand their problems better than anyone else. What is necessary is concrete assistance.

Before the start of the meeting, you made the following statement to the press, Madam President. I will quote it in part.

> "We all remember the risk of possible chemical attacks. All of these issues will be discussed during the Security Council meeting. The Russian Ministry of Defence has made a statement on this subject. I believe that this is an incredibly fake story, even by the standards of Russian propaganda. Those statements by the Ministry of Defence are absurd and comical. We are not preparing any chemical attacks. We think it would be best if the Russian Ministry of Defence and the Russian Government were to use their influence to convince Al-Assad not to use chemical weapons and not to attack his own population."

The Russian Ministry of Defence is not in the habit of issuing fake, absurd and comical statements. Maybe other countries' Ministries of Defence are wont to do that, but certainly not the Russian one. If our Ministry of Defence makes a statement, it does so based on concrete facts. Let me tell the Council a bit about that statement and leave it to members to decide whether or not it is comical.

In Syria, another provocation is being prepared with the use of chemical weapons. Terrorists associated with Jabhat al-Nusra who have occupied Idlib province are interested in stopping the Government army and are counting on further actions of intimidation by the United States and its allies against Damascus. It is hard to consider it a mere coincidence that the most loathsome leaders of the terrorists — Al-Baghdadi and Al-Julani — have recently made appearances in the news. According to reliable information, two large-capacity trucks arrived in the area of Saraqib from the village of Afs, accompanied by eight employees of the White Helmets. At the point of arrival, they were met by two high-ranking Ahrar al-Sham commanders. The White Helmets delivered a large volume of toxic substances to a warehouse for weapons and combustible lubricating materials located in Saraqib. Later, some of the chemicals, contained in unmarked plastic barrels, were transferred to small vehicles and transported to another militant base in the southern part of Idlib province. Eight containers of chlorine were delivered to the Idlib town of Jisr al-Shughur. After the cargo was transferred to fighters affiliated with Hizb al-Islami al-Turkistani, they were transported to the village of Halluz, where they were met by a special group that was supposed to stage a delivery of first aid to victims of chemical weapons. The Syrian side has informed the members of the Security Council and the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004) about this issue. The group underwent training in the handling of chemical weapons, under the leadership of the specialists of the British private security company Olive. With the active participation of Western intelligence agencies, the provocation is meant to serve as a pretext for the Western troika to conduct missile and air strikes against the military infrastructure of Syria, as it has done in the past.

We have all heard statements at the highest political level in Washington, D.C., London and Paris about the readiness to respond forcefully to chemical weapons. They are also threatening even broader actions, probably forgetting that following the April aggression, they stated that the alleged chemical potential of the regime at the time had been completely destroyed. It is not by chance that the destroyer *USS The Sullivans* arrived in the Persian Gulf, armed with 56 cruise missiles, or that a United States Air Force bomber, armed with 24 air-to-surface cruise missiles, arrived at the Al-Udeid air base in Qatar. In other words, we are being warned.

At the same time, Arab news networks have aired reports that cases of terrorist child abduction from villages in Idlib province have increased. These children will probably be used for the staged episodes directed by the White Helmets and funded by their Western sponsors.

The Syrian armed forces have no chemical weapon and have no plans to use such weapons. There is no military need to do so. We have stated that repeatedly. People in their right minds would not use means that are useless from a military point of view, as that would trigger reprisals from three major Powers. However, publicizing those plans and awaiting the provocation of militants could unleash such strikes. I am grateful for the warning about these developments. We in turn wish to warn that we are fully aware of those unsavoury plans and we strongly suggest that they be scrapped.

Carrying out such plans will deliver a further blow against a peaceful resolution in Syria, but the guerrillas who are being protected will not help.

We see how certain Western countries are more openly supporting Jabhat Al-Nusra and shielding the terrorists. The issue of chemicals is being crudely manipulated to pressure Damascus and its allies, and the sabre-rattling is intended to resolve internal domestic measures instead of reserving that energy to achieve a political settlement, fight terrorists and promote post-war reconstruction.

**The President**: Protocol requires me to thank the Russian representative for his statement. I will turn to some of his allegations in a moment. In my capacity as President, may I remind members of the Security Council and other speakers of presidential note S/2017/507 and that they should keep their remarks to a maximum of five minutes.

I will now speak in my national capacity — and I will certainly do that.

I would like to join other speakers in thanking John Ging and paying tribute to humanitarian workers: they work in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. I also want to reject the allegations we have just heard against the Department for Political Affairs. To the best of my knowledge, everybody in the United Nations is trying to do their best for the people of Syria and for the political process.

I think it is clear from everything we have heard today that the situation, especially in Idlib, is dire. All of the purported achievements on the list read out by the Russian representative are chimera. They will not help the people of Idlib. There are 3 million civilians at risk in Idlib, and yet the Syrian regime is escalating its military action against them. I would be grateful to know which forces have been relocated to Idlib, and I would like to say that we will hold the commanders responsible for attacks on civilians.

I would also like to echo the words of the representatives of the United States and France. The United Kingdom, too, will respond appropriately if the Al-Assad regime repeats its illegal use of chemical weapons, which has already had such devastating humanitarian consequences for the Syrian population.

I have three questions relating to the humanitarian situation. They centre around the fact that United Nations convoys have not had access to 6,000 internally displaced persons in Damascus and eastern Ghouta for two months, that 1 million people remain in hard-to-reach areas, where only 11 per cent of inter-agency convoys are able to conduct needs assessments and deliver aid, and that the United Nations continues not to be given the necessary security assurances so that humanitarian convoys can go through the Al-Ramtha border crossing from Jordan, which is in violation, as we have heard, of resolution 2393 (2017). I hope the Syrian representative will be able to give us an explanation in his remarks.

The Russian representative referred to refugees going home. I think the ongoing military operations, the lack of humanitarian access, the bombing of schools, the arbitrary arrests and the bombing of hospitals show exactly why the situation is not right for refugees to go home en masse.

Mr. Ging stated that Idlib represented a scale that we have not yet seen. We are used to superlatives when it comes to Syria, and we are used to them being surpassed. He also mentioned Kofi Annan, and, like others, I think the best tribute we can offer Mr. Annan is to continue our efforts to accelerate the political process and bring peace to Syria.

I do want to make a point reconstruction. As our Syrian colleague set out, and as echoed by every European Union member State and by the United States, there will be no reconstruction assistance until there is a credible and ongoing political process. There will not be a Marshall Plan for Syria; there will not be a Brussels plan for Syria. If there is any plan, it will appear to be in Moscow and a Putin plan.

I would now like to turn to some of the other statements made by the Russian Ambassador. The Russian Ministry of Defense today gave a briefing in which it said — and this has been echoed by members of his own Mission — that the United Kingdom and the White Helmets were involved in preparing chemical-weapons attacks against the Syrian people. I did not use the word "comical" in my press briefing. What I said was that, even by the egregious standards of Russian propaganda, this is an extraordinary allegation. It is wholly untrue. And it has been denied by the commander of the British forces in Kuwait, who is supporting the coalition. I am happy to repeat that denial now. And I am happy to rebut any allegation that the British Government or British forces engage with terrorists on the ground in Syria.

The only plausible explanation we have a for why these stories are being floated at the time, other than to increase the amount of fake news in the system, is as a smoke screen for a possible impending attack by the Syrian regime once again against its own people in Idlib. I repeat the statement that I, the French and the Americans made earlier about responding appropriately: we have no information about chlorine being delivered and, therefore, if the Russian Ministry does have that, the most probable explanation is that it as a pre-emptive attempt to set the agenda and the narrative for an appalling attack to come. I would appeal to Russia to use all its persuasive powers to convince the Syrian authorities not to attack their own population and never again to use prohibited chemical weapons.

I would draw the Council's attention to the fact that we have had a letter from the Syrian authorities about warning of an impending attack. I would recall for the Council that, on 10 March, the Syrian authorities wrote to the Security Council to warn of a chemical attack in eastern Ghouta, and one month later, on 10 April, such an attack took place and is attributed to the Syrian authorities.

I repeat again our abhorrence of chemical weapons. And I repeat gain that the British Government will always uphold its commitment to prohibit the use of such weapons and work with our international partners to ensure that that prohibition is upheld.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Ja'afari** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Madam President, for mentioning the two letters we sent to the President and members of the Security Council on the chemical issue and the very serious risk concerning the possible use of chemical weapons again in Idlib.

You asked me some questions, Madam President, and I hope that the presidency will be patient enough and listen to my responses for several minutes, given that I have listened to all the members of the Council for over an hour and a half. There are several important points requiring explanation that I shall mention before reading out my statement.

First, during the period in which the report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) was written, the Foreign Ministry approved 2,700 requests from the World Food Programme to provide assistance to liberated areas and others. The Foreign Ministry confirmed that it approved 2,700 requests.

Secondly, this month we have provided a detailed explanation to the members of the Council and Member States about the meaning and purposes of Law Number 10, which clearly refutes all the prejudiced and fallacious claims and information made by some about that Law. Hence, this topic should be withdrawn from circulation.

Thirdly, the Syrian Red Crescent continues to work, repeatedly and daily, with its local and international humanitarian partners to provide assistance. Dozens of convoys have arrived in areas where the inhabitants are in need of such assistance. Our problem with OCHA is as follows. Mr. Ging said earlier that only four convoys had been given approval by the Government. That is not true. Our problem with OCHA is that it counts only its own convoys. For example, it does not count convoys from the World Food Programme or the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. It does not count Red Cross convoys either. Therefore, thousands of convoys and tons of assistance are being delivered to areas where it is needed without being counted by OCHA. Again, according to OCHA only four convoys were given access this month. That is not true. This erroneous information misleads the members of the Security Council.

We have warned numerous times about the presence of a huge, unruly elephant in the Chamber that imperils our joint work and steps with its huge feet over many facts in order to cover the violations perpetrated against the Charter of the United Nations and international law by certain permanent members.

Apparently, the policies and practices of Western Governments against my country still contiue. Instead of shouldering the political and legal responsibility for waging a terrorist war against Syria and its people, and instead of correcting the disastrous policies against our region in general, and against my country, Syria, in particular, those Governments are insisting on their policy of aggression while using their black banners, White Helmets and red lines. They are currently preparing another staged bloody chemical-weapons incident in the north-west of Syria. The goal is to hinder the current political process and justify aggression by

Western countries in the Council against my country so as to occupy parts of our territory and strengthen the remnants of terrorist groups operating in certain areas.

My Government condemns the statement made a few days ago by the United States, France and the United Kingdom. It rejects both the content and format of that statement. Syria has repeatedly underscored that it considers the use of chemical weapons as immoral, and condemns their use anywhere, under any circumstances and against whomsoever. Syria once again reiterates that it does not possess any chemical weapons, and has lived up to all its obligations with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which has informed international bodies and the Council that Syria has lived up to its obligations in that regard. It is futile to have to repeat at every meeting that the Syrian chemical stockpiles were destroyed on the United States vessel *MV Cape Ray* in the Mediterranean Sea. Meanwhile, we await the approval of the Council for the destruction of Israeli stockpiles of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

I would like to make available to the Security Council documented information about preparations by terrorists from the Al-Nusra Front and affiliated groups to use chemical weapons against civilians in Idlib in order to then accuse Syrian forces and thereby justify military aggression by the Governments that support those terrorist groups — as was the case during the American aggression against Al-Shouayrat airport on 7 April 2017, and the tripartite American-British-French aggression on 14 April 2018.

As to the preparations for committing this crime, we strongly call on those countries with influence over the terrorist groups to forbid them from committing it. I would recall that eight containers of chlorine were transferred to the village of Hallouz in Idlib as part of preparations for this new staged incident of chemical aggression. Terrorists related to the Islamic Party of Turkistan and the Al-Nusra Front, whom the drafters of the Secretariat's reports refer to as "non-State military opposition", are planning to use toxic chemical substances against Syrian civilians, including dozens of children who were kidnapped few days ago in Aleppo and Idlib countryside in order to then accuse the Syrian Government and justify an aggression against it.

Any act of aggression against my country, if it happens, is an act of aggression against a founding Member of the United Nations, as well as aggression against international peace and security. It would constitute support for terrorism and target the efforts we have made with our allies to combat it. Of course, what goes around comes around.

I shall limit my statement to that, given your request, Madam President, although this is a very important meeting that concerns my country. Yet everyone else took the floor for quite a long time.

**The President**: I again remind everyone of the existence of presidential note S/2017/507. We return to the issue of Syria every month. That is plenty of time for people to make their points.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite colleagues to come to the Consultations Room for informal consultations on two subjects.

*The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.*

United Nations S/PV.8333

# Security Council

Seventy-third year

*Provisional*

**8333**rd meeting
Tuesday, 28 August 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

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| *President:* | Lord Ahmad/Ms. Pierce | (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) |
| *Members:* | Bolivia (Plurinational State of) | Mrs. Cordova Soria |
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| | Côte d'Ivoire | Mr. Ipo |
| | Equatorial Guinea | Mrs. Mele Colifa |
| | Ethiopia | Ms. Guadey |
| | France | Mrs. Gueguen |
| | Kazakhstan | Mr. Umarov |
| | Kuwait | Mr. Alotaibi |
| | Netherlands | Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren |
| | Peru | Mr. Meza-Cuadra |
| | Poland | Ms. Wronecka |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Nebenzia |
| | Sweden | Mr. Orrenius Skau |
| | United States of America | Mrs. Haley |

## Agenda

The situation in Myanmar

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in Myanmar**

**The President**: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh and Myanmar to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tegegnework Gettu, Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme; and Ms. Cate Blanchett, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, and now give him the floor.

**The Secretary-General**: I join representatives today with a heavy heart. The massive refugee emergency that began one year ago in Rakhine state, Myanmar, has become one of the world's worst humanitarian and human rights crises. Last month, I visited Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh and heard stories of horrendous persecution and suffering. One father broke down as he told me how his son was shot dead in front of him, his mother was brutally murdered and his house burned to the ground. He took refuge in a mosque only to be discovered by soldiers, who abused him and burned the Qur'an.

I know that members of the Council heard similar harrowing accounts while on their own visit to the region. In their press statement of 9 May (SC/13331), Council members highlighted the degree to which they were "struck by the scale of the humanitarian crisis" and that they remained "gravely concerned by the current situation". They also reaffirmed the presidential statement of 6 November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22), in which the Security Council "strongly condemns the widespread violence that has taken place in Rakhine state", and expressed

> "grave concern over reports of human rights violations and abuses in Rakhine state, including by the Myanmar security forces, in particular against persons belonging to the Rohingya community".

One year ago, I immediately condemned the attacks by extremists against the security forces, but such attacks could never justify the disproportionate use of force against civilian populations and the gross human rights violations committed by the Myanmar security forces and their allies. Last September, I sent an official letter to the Council (S/2017/753) urging concerted efforts to prevent further escalation of the crisis in northern Rakhine state. Following my direct engagement with the Myanmar authorities and several initiatives on the ground conducted by the United Nations system, I expressed my concerns regarding the dramatic humanitarian and human rights situations. I emphasized the threats to regional peace and security posed by further degeneration.

As the Council knows, I have also been working to advance a policy of engagement and unified action to encourage positive actions by the Government, help defuse tensions among communities and build confidence and trust. In April I appointed Christine Schraner Burgener as my Special Envoy on Myanmar. She is undertaking a process of broad consultations, including with the Government and military, civil society and women's groups. I appreciate the Council's strong support and welcome Myanmar's positive cooperation with her so far. In June, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme and the Myanmar authorities finalized the memorandum of understanding that establishes a framework for cooperation to create the conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of refugees from Bangladesh. The memorandum of understanding is also aimed at helping to create improved and resilient livelihoods for all communities living in Rakhine state.

Of course, that all requires massive investment, not only in reconstruction and development for all communities in one of Myanmar's poorest regions, but also in reconciliation and respect for human rights. I do not yet see the commitment required for that investment to take place. It is clear that conditions have not yet been met for the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees to their places of origin or choice. I ask members of the Security Council to join me in urging the Myanmar authorities to cooperate with the

United Nations and ensure immediate, unimpeded and effective access for its agencies and partners. We must also continue to press for the release of journalists who have been arrested for reporting on this human tragedy.

Access is critical to meeting the enormous needs and allaying the fears of refugees who would like to return home. For the people who remain in Rakhine, it would allow for consultations on quick-impact projects, based on their assessed needs. Those Rohingya who remain in Rakhine continue to face marginalization and discrimination. Many have been cut off from life-saving humanitarian assistance. Some 130,000 Rohingya remain confined in camps, with severe restrictions on their freedom of movement. They have extremely limited access to health, education and other essential services and to ways of making a living. There can be no excuse for delaying the quest for dignified solutions that will allow people to return to their areas of origin in safety and dignity, in line with international standards and human rights. The United Nations remains ready to help develop such a plan. Voluntary relocation along with freedom of movement, an end to segregation and discrimination, inclusive development, the re-establishment of the rule of law and public safety are essential. It is ultimately the responsibility of Myanmar's leaders to demonstrate greater resolve in upholding the principles of equality and non-discrimination, while countering incitement to racial hatred and violence.

Once again, I would like to applaud the tremendous generosity of the Bangladeshi authorities and host communities. But the response to the crisis must be a global one. The international humanitarian appeal for the Rohingya crisis remains significantly underfunded at 33 per cent. Much more must be done to alleviate the very real risks to life from current and impending monsoons. I am grateful to the World Bank and its President, Jim Yong Kim, for mobilizing almost half a billion dollars in grant-based support for Rohingya refugees and host communities. The grant-based assistance approved by the Asian Development Bank is also crucial to meeting medium-term needs and providing assistance for life-saving priorities. Yet, refugees need more access to education and livelihoods to avoid further vulnerability to the risks of trafficking, sexual exploitation and radicalization.

I cannot forget the stories I heard in Cox's Bazar. One distraught woman gestured to a mother cradling her young baby, who was conceived as a result of rape, and told me,

> "We need security in Myanmar and citizenship. And we want justice for what our sisters, our daughters and our mothers have suffered".

Accountability is essential for genuine reconciliation among all ethnic groups and is a prerequisite for regional security and stability. Regrettably, Myanmar has refused to cooperate with United Nations human rights entities and mechanisms, despite repeated calls to do so, including from members of the Council. We have called for different accountability options to be considered. Most recently, very strong concerns have been expressed by the United Nations Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, appointed by the Human Rights Council. Its report, issued yesterday, found patterns of "gross human rights violations and abuses" (*A/HRC/39/64, para. 100*) committed by the security forces, which it said "undoubtedly amount to the gravest crimes under international law" (*ibid., para. 100*).

I believe the report's findings and recommendations deserve serious consideration by all relevant United Nations bodies. Effective international cooperation will be critical to ensuring that accountability mechanisms are credible, transparent, impartial, independent and comply with Myanmar's obligations under international law.

The Council has issued a strong presidential statement. We also have clear recommendations from the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission on Rakhine State as a guiding framework, which takes into account the needs of the victims and address root causes, including discrimination, persecution and the lack of legal status. I would like to take this opportunity to again commend the statesmanship of the late former Secretary-General in Myanmar and elsewhere. But much remains to be done to provide the necessary conditions for peace and justice in Rakhine. As long as a climate of fear and persecution prevails in Rakhine, voluntary returns will not take place.

All communities in Rakhine state are poor and need sustainable and inclusive development, which is also essential for reconciliation and peace. I would add that patterns of violations against ethnic and religious minorities beyond Rakhine must also end if genuine democracy is to take root.

A year has passed. The crisis cannot continue indefinitely. The Council has shown unity in adopting its presidential statement. That unity remains essential if we are to answer clear appeals with action.

**The President**: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Gettu.

**Mr. Gettu**: I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Council.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) continues to share the international community's concerns about the situation in Rakhine state and the plight of the Rohingya people. We fully align ourselves with the view that there is a need to create the conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees from Bangladesh, as foreseen in the memorandum of understanding signed by the Government of Myanmar, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Programme.

Myanmar faces multiple transitions today regarding the ongoing peace process, economic liberalization and democratic reforms. It is within that context that the root causes of inequality and discrimination against the Rohingya population need to be addressed. Competition for land and resources in Rakhine, which is the second-poorest state in the country, discriminatory laws and institutions, as well as intercommunal mistrust and tensions, contribute to some of those root causes.

Creating sustainable conditions for voluntary returns requires comprehensive and durable solutions. Addressing the significant development challenges of all communities in Rakhine and removing local orders that restrict the freedom of movement and access to basic services are critical in creating such conditions. It also requires that every refugee has the freedom to decide when to return based on a free and informed choice.

Dealing with those issues may also go a long way towards building greater intercommunal confidence and trust among the people of Rakhine state. As noted by the Secretary-General, the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission provide a road map for addressing those issues. Recently, the Government of Myanmar convened the United Nations system to take stock of the implementation of those recommendations, which was a positive step.

As a first step towards creating conditions conducive for voluntary returns to Rakhine state, UNDP and UNHCR have been working closely to begin the implementation of the tripartite memorandum of understanding. We have reinforced our capacity on the ground to begin that important work. We have also jointly held a range of preparatory consultations with the Government of Myanmar at all levels, including the technical working group set up by the Government to support the implementation of the memorandum of understanding.

In early July, we jointly undertook a first visit, albeit symbolic, to the northern part of Rakhine, which was followed by a joint familiarization field visit with the technical working group later that month. We welcome those preliminary measures taken by Myanmar and look forward to moving ahead constructively and meaningfully. However, effective access and streamlined procedures are essential for us to access entire village tracts and undertake area-based programmes that are inclusive, in line with conflict-sensitive methods, and that build social cohesion. That remains outstanding.

Free and independent consultations with all communities to identify their needs is a necessary step to design and deliver community-based, quick-impact projects that address livelihoods and basic needs to build trust within and between communities. They also lay the foundation for planning longer-term sustainable development, as foreseen in the memorandum of understanding. That, together with freedom of movement and a pathway to citizenship, will be critical benchmarks that must be achieved.

In addition to the memorandum of understanding implementation, UNDP, UNHCR and several other United Nations agencies have been working in other parts of Rakhine state to implement wide-ranging development and humanitarian assistance initiatives, with major donor support. Part of the broader solution in Rakhine lies in tackling some very challenging issues in addition to the issue of freedom of movement, such as access to livelihoods, education and health services; respect for the rule of law; and respecting, promoting and protecting human rights. UNDP is currently helping to address some of those challenges through support for resilience-based recovery and sustainable development.

We would like to acknowledge the Government of Bangladesh for its generous hospitality and support to

the Rohingya refugees. As anticipated, the monsoon, coupled with the limited resources made available to the United Nations and its partners to meet the needs of refugees and host communities, have made the living conditions for refugees in Cox's Bazar very precarious. Creating conditions conducive for voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable returns to Myanmar is a process that requires at least medium-term planning. Continuing to address the needs of all those affected in Cox's Bazar is of primary importance.

In conclusion, we wish to underline the importance of pursuing a comprehensive and durable solution, with effective access, freedom of movement and a pathway to citizenship being critical building blocks for the sustainable development of Rakhine state. We reiterate our strong commitment and continued constructive engagement with the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in creating an environment where people of all communities can live together.

**The President**: I thank Mr. Gettu for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Blanchett.

**Ms. Blanchett**: I am honoured by this opportunity to address the Security Council at this critical juncture. I am not here as an expert. I stand before members of the Security Council merely as a witness, as someone who has seen and cannot look away. I went to Bangladesh last March as a Goodwill Ambassador of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to see what I could possibly contribute in response to the massive humanitarian needs unfolding there. Nothing could have prepared me for the extent and depth of suffering I saw.

An 18-year-old woman, whom I will call Laila, is chief among my memories. One of the 720,000 stateless Rohingya refugees who fled violence and abuse in Myanmar's Rahkine state since last August, Laila fled her burning village with her infant son, Yousuf. As she cradled Yousuf in her arms, she described to me how her husband was forcibly taken from her village and has not been heard from since. She also described how, five days later, those same people returned, setting fire to her home and forcing her to flee alone with her baby. She saw her uncle killed by men with knives. She told me: "When I saw that, I just ran". She and her son hid in a forest for months, surviving off plants and trees. Her harrowing journey ended in Bangladesh, where her present hardship persists.

Another refugee family took her and Yousuf in, sharing their cramped shelter. As I sat with Laila, a small child played behind me. I noticed terrible scars on his leg. When I asked how he came by those, his family told me he had been caught in the flames when their home had been torched. Luckily, they pulled him free, but the scars will remain — both the physical and the psychological.

If only such stories were atypical. But, visiting with refugee families in Bangladesh, I found that they were shockingly routine. Like those present, I have heard the gut-wrenching accounts — stories of grave torture, women brutally violated, people whose loved ones have been killed before their eyes and children who have seen their grandparents locked in houses that were set alight.

I am a mother, and I saw my own children in the eyes of every single refugee child whom I met. I saw myself in every parent. How can any mother endure seeing her child thrown into a fire? Their experiences will never leave me. That is why I am immensely grateful that the Security Council — the principle body responsible for maintaining international peace and security — is working in unison to resolve that crisis.

I am particularly thankful to the Secretary-General for giving voice to the Rohingya over the last decade and for continuing to demonstrate exemplary leadership on the matter. I must also pay homage to the former Secretary-General, the late Mr. Kofi Annan, who gave us a clear and practical vision to resolve the crisis in Rakhine state — a vision that is shared by the Council and one which the Government of Myanmar has committed to implementing. It is a vision that, if realized, will ensure that women, men and children of different religions, ethnicities and backgrounds in Rakhine state can thrive collectively. But as the Council and the United Nations work with the Government of Myanmar to ensure that, urgent efforts are still needed for the Rohingya in Bangladesh.

It is important to recall that this is not the first wave of massive forced displacement of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh in the past 40 years. The scale of displacement is so large and severe that today there are more Rohingya living in exile than in Myanmar itself. In 1978, 200,000 Rohingya refugees streamed into Bangladesh, fleeing brutality and widespread abuse. Gul Zahar, at the time, a young Rohingya woman, was among those who fled. Fourteen years later, in

1992, another wave of violence forced 250,000 stateless Rohingya refugees to seek safety in neighbouring Bangladesh. Once again, Gul Zahar was among those who fled. There are today 900,000 stateless Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Gul Zahar, now 90-years-old, is sadly among them. Four decades following her initial flight, Gul lives in abject poverty in Bangladesh with the sole wish that her great grandchildren will have a better future. The need for such a future to transpire inside Myanmar has never been more urgent. If we fail to act now, Gul's grandchildren, like thousands of others, will be unable to escape the relentless cycle that generations of Rohingya have experienced.

Bangladesh's recent response — receiving more than 700,000 refugees in a matter of months and providing them safety — is one of the most visible and significant gestures of humanity in our time, but the needs are vast and the suffering acute. Much more international support is needed. Thanks to the efforts of the Bangladeshi Government, the host communities, relevant United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the refugees themselves, lifesaving efforts have ensured that the Rohingya refugees have endured the monsoons largely unscathed. Yet, as Council members saw for themselves, they continue to live in squalid conditions. With only 33 per cent of the refugee operation funded — amounting to less than 70 cents per person per day — that is not surprising. Rather, it is quite embarrassing. Many Bangladeshi villagers living nearby, with very little to call their own, have been helping the Rohingya refugees over the past year. If people with so little can step up, why can we not do better? Refugees need to feed their families. They need clean water and sanitation facilities to wash, cook and clean. They need a secure shelter to weather the monsoons and the heat. Their children need an education. Their grandparents need to be cared for. But they need more than just food and water, informal schools and temporary shelter. They need a future.

In the refugee settlements of Bangladesh today, women who were raped in Myanmar are now giving birth to children. Those children, already burdened by statelessness, are likely to carry that stigma for the rest of their lives. Many women like Laila, along with their children, continue to be vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Many continue to battle the scars of trauma and injury, which they received before and during their flight to Bangladesh. It is imperative that Governments, development and humanitarian agencies, the private sector and individuals work in solidarity to find innovative ways to help the refugees and the Bangladeshi host communities.

The focus of our efforts must be to provide much-needed support inside Bangladesh, while working to ensure that conditions in Myanmar are conducive to returns. The many refugees with whom I spoke consider Myanmar their home, but they have real, deep fears about returning there. The denial of their right to move, their right to marry, their right to work and their right to health care and education renders them among the most vulnerable people on the planet. Refugees move back home when it is safe and secure to do so. The Rohingya cannot return to the very conditions they were forced to flee. They cannot settle for half solutions. They must know that they belong. A clear pathway to full citizenship is essential. This is not a luxury. This is not a privilege. This is a basic right that all of us here enjoy, which the Rohingya do not.

I implore the Council not to forget this imperative, support all efforts to make it a reality and, in the meantime, encourage more robust international support needed to meet urgent and pressing needs within Bangladesh. My mind often returns to Laila and her neighbours. Did she find out what happened to her husband? Did her shared temporary shelter survive the monsoons? Did she manage to celebrate Eid al-Fitr last week? Will her young son Yousuf be able to return home to Myanmar and go to school one day? Or, like Gul Zahar, will he too suffer an endless cycle of fear and forced displacement?

Together, we need to change the future of Laila, Yousuf, Gul Zahar and of the Rohingya living in Myanmar, Bangladesh and beyond. There are no short cuts. There are no alternatives. We have failed the Rohingya before. Please, let us not fail them again.

**The President**: I thank Ms. Blanchett for her very poignant and moving briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the United Nations of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The plight of the Rohingya community is one of the largest refugee crises in recent history, and it is one of the most pressing humanitarian and human rights crises facing the Security Council today. One year since the Rohingya population of Rakhine state

was subjected to a campaign of the most truly horrific violence, resulting in grave violations of their human rights and expulsion and deportation from their homes, the Council has a duty to ensure that they receive justice and the prospect of a peaceful future. The report of the Independent International Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar (A/HRC/39/64) issued yesterday by the Human Rights Council is the most authoritative account to date of the crimes committed against the Rohingya community. The report details widespread rape and murder committed by the Burmese military, the systemic oppression and persecution they have suffered for many years, and the patterns of violence and violations committed elsewhere in the country.

The Council is charged by the international community with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Crimes against humanity, such as those detailed in the Fact-Finding Mission's report, threaten international peace. They threaten international security. Forced deportations across borders, such as those that the Rohingya suffered crossing into Bangladesh, are unfriendly acts, but they also threaten international peace and security. It is therefore incumbent upon the Council that it consider the report in depth, once the Fact-Finding Mission has made its final presentation to the Human Rights Council in September.

But let us be clear: those most affected by the crisis now reside in Bangladesh. As we already heard, with more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees joining more than 300,000 displaced people in previous rounds of violence, Bangladesh, together with the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations, has saved many thousands of lives. Bangladesh, working together with the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations, has taken significant steps to mitigate the worst effects of the monsoon season in recent months. And as we already heard — indeed, so movingly from Ms. Blanchett — the Rohingya need our continued support. Their needs range from food, shelter and clean water, to education, livelihoods and specialized assistance. We must not forget that they need specialized support and assistance for the victims of sexual violence. The United Nations joint response plan remains desperately underfunded, and it is imperative that we all step up and play our part.

But the solution to the crisis — let us be clear — lies in Burma. The Rohingya community deserves justice. The Fact-Finding Mission has concluded that what happened in Rakhine last year warrants

> "the investigation and prosecution of senior officials in the Tatmadaw chain of command, so that a competent court can determine their liability for genocide in relation to the situation in Rakhine State." (*A/HRC/39/64, para. 87*)

With so much at stake, it is the Council that has a duty to ensure that there is no impunity for such acts.

As Prime Minister Teresa May's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, let me assure the Council, let me assure Rohingya community: this is a key priority for our Government, for our Prime Minister and for myself. The Rohingya must be able to return home to Rakhine safely, voluntarily and, importantly, with dignity. That means more than returning to internally displaced persons camps on the Burmese side of the border, but real progress towards a more just long-term solution and state of affairs in Rakhine.

As a result of the Council's concerted action, though, we have seen some steps forward. The Burmese Government has engaged with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, whose diplomatic work we support. It has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It has established a commission of inquiry to look into reports of human rights violations. Those steps are welcome. They have not been easy for the civilian Government, whose action remains constrained by the military, but more needs to be done. The steps taken are not enough. The Burmese authorities need to provide UNHCR and UNDP unconditional and unqualified access to northern Rakhine. Until those United Nations agencies can operate effectively, it is impossible to argue that conditions in Rakhine are anywhere near what is required for the safe, voluntary and dignified repatriation that the Council has called for.

There is an urgent need for domestic acceptance and accountability in Burma. It is essential that the Burmese Government set out how its commission of inquiry will be able to investigate those crimes with full impartiality, how it will access United Nations information and how it will be linked to a judicial process to hold accountable those responsible — and let us be clear: particularly those in the military. It is

far from clear that any mechanism established by the Burmese authorities can do that, which is why the United Kingdom supports keeping open the option of justice delivered through international mechanisms.

We need to see practical progress on implementing the Rakhine Advisory Commission's recommendations. That includes recommendations on economic development, which are part of the solution, but it also includes those related to the rights of the Rohingya, including a pathway to citizenship. Those recommendations taken comprehensively, as they were set out by the revered and respected late Kofi Annan, remain the best blueprint for a long-term solution in Rakhine.

What does it mean for us? What does it mean for the Security Council? It means, in our view, that the Council should do three things. First, it should continue to assist Bangladesh and the United Nations in providing protection and assistance to the Rohingya population and their host communities. Secondly, it should take concerted action to push for justice and the prospect of a peaceful future, which the Rohingya community deserves. That includes holding a serious discussion on the conclusions of the Fact-Finding Mission's report. Thirdly, it should support those in Burma who are pushing for progress. But we should also be prepared to use the full range of tools at the Council's disposal to apply pressure against those, including the Burmese military, who obstruct it. The United Kingdom has done that within the European Union, where we have sanctioned seven senior Burmese military officials.

But we all accept that this crisis is complex and has deep roots. It will not be solved overnight. But let us also be clear: it will not be solved without continued engagement and action from the Council. As we mark one year on from the violence of August 2017, therefore, the Council should shoulder its responsibility and do justice to the gravity of the attacks on the Rohingya community. We should not be just discussing and debating. We need to be acting, acting to bring an end to the appalling ethnic cleansing, to help those suffering refugees and bring justice for the victims of those appalling crimes.

I appeal to all fellow members. Let us put aside our differences. Let us act on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and on our obligations in front of us. Let us act in the interests of Leila, in the interests of Yousef and in the interests of tens of thousands of Leilas and Yousefs. Let us act for the sake of humankind.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

**Mrs. Gueguen** (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, first of all, to warmly thank you, Mr. President, for having taken the initiative of convening this meeting almost a year to the day after the beginning of the crisis in Rakhine state. I would also like to commend the personal commitment of the Secretary-General in drawing attention to and mobilizing international action to be taken on behalf of this tragedy. I would also like to warmly thank the Goodwill Ambassador for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Ms. Cate Blanchett, and Assistant Secretary-General Tegegnework Gettu for their briefings on this situation, which deserves the continued and resolute attention of the Security Council.

Almost a year ago, before the General Assembly, the President of France denounced the ethnic cleansing suffered by the Rohingya (see A/72/PV.4). Since then, France has consistently stressed its concern about the serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in an organized, coordinated and systematic manner in Rakhine state. I would like to make three observations today.

First, commitments have been made by the Burmese authorities and must now be fully implemented. While those are first steps that should be encouraged, the progress seen on the ground remains very limited and is not commensurate with the scale and gravity of the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that have been committed. In that regard, France is very concerned by the conclusions of the advance version of the report of the Human Rights Council's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission in Myanmar (A/HRC/39/64), according to which the Burmese army could be accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, which fall within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. France calls on the international community to undertake determined action to collect and protect evidence, and to ensure that those responsible for the crimes committed against the Rohingya population be brought to justice.

France also reiterates its call on the Burmese authorities to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission. We have

taken note of Burma's establishment of a commission of inquiry on human rights violations. However, at this stage, we have no information guaranteeing the independence or the impartiality of that mechanism, or on the protection provided to witnesses. We also condemn the serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed against children. We hope that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, who recently visited the country, will soon be able to brief the Council on her mission and provide it with an update.

We also welcome the conclusion in June of a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is an essential step to enable the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees when the time comes. Nonetheless, we are concerned about ongoing restrictions of access. Only unimpeded access to all affected villages and communities will allow us to determine whether the conditions for such returns have been met.

With regard to the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by the late Secretary-General Kofi Annan, figures are regularly put forward by the Burmese authorities, but we have very little concrete information on how the measures are actually being implemented. France reiterates in particular the importance of the recommendations related to the issue of citizenship, revising the 1982 law and ensuring equal rights for all members of the Rohingya community. We also support the recommendations concerning the freedom of movement, media access and socioeconomic development in Rakhine state.

Secondly, I would like to focus briefly on the humanitarian dimension of the crisis. France, both in its national capacity and within the European Union, is providing support to Bangladesh, which continues to host on its territory, with admirable generosity, almost 1 million Rohingya refugees living in particularly precarious conditions. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and all of the humanitarian organizations and United Nations agencies concerned have done outstanding work. The international community must continue to support Bangladesh and humanitarian agencies in accordance with three priorities: first, by increasing its contributions to the United Nations humanitarian response plan, which is currently funded at only 33 per cent; secondly, by continuing to take the measures necessary to protect the Rohingya people from security and health risks in camps; and, thirdly, by continuing to support Bangladesh, humanitarian actors and local host populations to make the living conditions of the Rohingya refugees as sustainable as possible, while preserving Bangladesh's national prospects for economic development. Special attention must be paid to the needs of children, particularly with regard to education, and to the needs of women who have suffered untold violence. I still think about the images and testimonies of the women whom we met during our visit last spring to Cox's Bazar.

My final point is that the Security Council and the international community must remain fully committed to ensuring close monitoring of the full implementation of November's presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22) and of the tripartite agreement concluded among Burma's civilian Government, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme regarding the return of refugees.

The response to the tragedy of the Rohingya requires addressing the root causes of the crisis. It also requires justice to be done. The Council had an opportunity several weeks ago to thoroughly exchange views with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, and to express to her its full support in the discharge of her duties. We encourage the Burmese authorities to continue to collaborate closely with the Special Envoy in order to arrive at a lasting solution. The week of high-level general debate of the General Assembly, to be held next month, will also be an opportunity to pursue mobilization. In the absence of tangible progress on the ground over the coming weeks, we will need to carefully consider what new steps the Council could take to respond to the Rohingya refugee crisis.

**Mr. Orrenius Skau** (Sweden): Halabja 1988, Srebrenica 1995, Darfur 2003. The list of examples in modern history where violence has triumphed is long, too long. Regrettably, it seems a new name will now be added to that tragic list: Rakhine 2017. The reports of systematic and widespread human rights violations and abuses against the Rohingya community in Rakhine state, as well as other gross violations of international law committed in Kachin and Shan states, cannot be neglected. We have seen clear indications of crimes

against humanity. Horrifying testimonies of torture and inhumane treatment, rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, summary and arbitrary killings, have left no one untouched.

Let me thank you, Mr. President, for having called this meeting, marking one year since the violence in Rakhine began to escalate. Let me also thank the Secretary General for his strong statement, as well as for his personal commitment and engagement. We also recognize Ms. Cate Blanchett's important contribution to mobilizing needed support and attention.

Sweden has actively contributed to the Security Council's engagement on Myanmar since the first day of our membership. Some steps to address the situation have been taken — in November 2017, a united Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22) setting out a plan for action; in March this year, the Council paid a successful visit to the region to gain a first-hand understanding and convey clear messages; and in April, a United Nations Special Envoy was appointed with strong political support for her mandate. But clearly that was not enough. We need to ask ourselves what more we could have done to prevent these atrocities from happening in the first place. Honest lessons must be drawn for future efforts to ensure that it never happens again.

Yesterday, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, a United Nations-mandated body with distinguished membership, presented credible and solid findings on the gravity of the atrocities committed by the Myanmar security forces. This is significant and must be followed by meaningful action. The Chair of the Fact-Finding Mission should be given an opportunity to present the report (A/HRC/39/64) to the Security Council as soon as possible. In that regard, we recall the letter circulated to the Council in July, during the Swedish presidency, proposing that the Fact-Finding Mission present its findings and recommendations to the Council.

Several initiatives by the Myanmar Government to meet repeated demands for accountability have been announced, but they have regrettably all proven to fall short of expectations. With facts now having been established, the international community must shoulder its responsibility and act on accountability. Sweden has previously called for the Council to consider a referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court. In the light of the Fact Finding Mission's report, we believe it is time to move forward, and we need to consult among Council members on a draft resolution to that end. At the same time, we should continue to work in other international bodies to ensure the establishment of an international mechanism for full and independent investigations.

In addition to ensuring accountability, there are several other matters that the Council already has agreed upon that also need to be urgently addressed.

First, responses to the humanitarian needs of the refugees in Cox's Bazar must be stepped up. We commend efforts by Bangladesh. Substantially increased financial support, however, is also needed for bolstering resilience. In that regard, we welcome the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank's recent engagement. Protection in the refugee camps, not least for the most vulnerable, must be improved. Special attention should be given to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, be they women, girls or boys. More secure land must be provided and general security in the camps must be improved.

Secondly, the continuously dire situation in Rakhine also needs to be addressed. Full access to Rakhine for United Nations agencies, as well as for non-governmental organizations and the media, is urgent and necessary. The tripartite memorandum of understanding signed with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme must be implemented in full and without delay.

Thirdly, conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified returns to areas of origin must be ensured. In that regard, the implementation of the recommendations of the report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by the late Kofi Annan, must be stepped up to address the root causes, including the issue of citizenship. Security, reconstruction and livelihood programmes must also be urgently provided for.

Reflecting on one of the major tragedies in recent times, the late former Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted with regret that "in their greatest hour of need, the world failed the people of Rwanda". The Council cannot turn a blind eye to the atrocities committed against the Rohingya. We must now take full responsibility and do our utmost to end this nightmare. History will not look kindly upon those who fail to do so.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Secretary-General, Ms. Blanchett and Mr. Gettu for their briefings on the situation in Myanmar.

For our part, we consistently advocate a balanced and non-confrontational approach when discussing the situation in this country and when looking for ways to normalize the situation in Rakhine state, including when dealing with the issue of refugees. We note the orderly work being done by the country's authorities to implement the recommendations of the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission's on Rakhine state to find a comprehensive solution to the crisis. To date, 81 of the 88 recommendations have been fulfilled.

We welcome Myanmar's repeatedly confirmed official readiness to ensure the phased return of all refugees and displaced persons, including from Bangladesh. We greatly appreciate the measures carried out in Rakhine state to establish the necessary infrastructure to receive and accommodate future migrants. We note the establishment, on 30 July, of an independent commission of inquiry, which is headed by and includes authoritative foreign representatives, such as Rosario Manalo and Kenzo Oshima. That decision was adopted in Naypyidaw as part of a national initiative to guarantee reconciliation, peace, stability and development in Rakhine state.

We are convinced that the key to resolving the issue of refugees is bilateral cooperation between Myanmar and Bangladesh. A legal agreement struck between both parties and existing coordination mechanisms that will allow them to move to practical steps to that end. We believe that it would be counterproductive to decide to extend the deadlines for the repatriation process, which is being used by some external forces to put additional pressure on Myanmar.

At this stage, we think that the priority is to establish international assistance in order to overcome the most serious humanitarian elements of the crisis. In that regard, we believe that it is necessary to assist both Bangladesh and Myanmar. Our efforts underline the need to assist both sides equally. In 2018 and 2019, the Russian Federation will allocate $1 million to the two countries through the World Food Programme.

We believe that the role of the international community should also include helping Naypyidaw and Dhaka to implement the agreements that they have already made. In that regard, a positive example is the close cooperation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme with the Government of Myanmar on implementing the 6 June tripartite memorandum of understanding on cooperation, as well as the activities of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, who visited the country in June and July this year to participate in the Union Peace Conference. We also note the decision of the Myanmar authorities to agree to her opening an office in Naypyidaw.

We believe the issues in Rakhine state to be among a number of serious challenges facing the democratically elected authorities in Myanmar. Attempts to assign responsibility to Naypyidaw for resolving the crisis disregard the terrorist attacks that have exacerbated the crisis Rakhine state and made it more difficult to establish sustainable inter-ethnic peace in the country and to ensure effective cooperation with the international community.

We believe that the key to resolving the problem in Rakhine state is to establish bilateral dialogue and restore trust between Bangladesh and Myanmar. We therefore welcome any contact between the two sides, including the ministerial-level meeting in Naypyidaw on 10 August, at which agreements were reached on the modalities for the eventual return of refugees to Rakhine state and for strengthening cooperation on combating terrorism and drug trafficking.

As we have already said, we believe that the crisis should be resolved primarily on a bilateral basis through negotiations between Myanmar and Bangladesh. The deep-seated problems in Rakhine are multifaceted and complex and can be resolved only through peaceful diplomatic and political means and by establishing dialogue between the authorities of Naypyidaw and Dhaka, including representatives of all ethnicities and religions. We believe that assistance to the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in resolving the issues around Rakhine state should be provided in a spirit of equality and mutual respect. We hope that all parties will act responsibly and with restraint in order to prevent the situation from escalating once again.

**Mr. Wu Haitao** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes you, Sir, presiding over this open briefing. We thank Secretary-General Guterres and Mr. Gettu, Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for their

briefings. China listened carefully to the presentation by Ms. Blanchett, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador.

Recently, with the concerted efforts of the countries concerned, countries of the region and United Nations agencies, there have been some positive developments in resolving the issue of Myanmar's Rakhine state. In early August, Bangladesh and Myanmar held a ministerial meeting to discuss the implementation of the bilateral repatriation agreement. Consensus was achieved on issues such as verification forms, displaced persons in the border area and the establishment of a hotline between ministers. Currently, Myanmar is ready to receive those who fled to Bangladesh.

Myanmar and Bangladesh received visits from Special Envoy on Myanmar Ms. Burgener and held in-depth exchanges with her on the Rakhine issue. Myanmar agreed to the Special Envoy's regional office being headquartered in Naypyidaw. The office is already in operation. The Myanmar Government signed a memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNDP. The three parties held two joint working group meetings and are preparing for a joint field visit. Recently, the Myanmar Government also received visits from officials of UNHCR, UNDP, the International Organization for Migration and the World Bank.

The Government and the local people of Bangladesh have maintained their massive humanitarian support to the displaced people in Bangladesh and striven to improve their living conditions and to make proper arrangements to deal with the impacts of the rainy season and hurricanes. Myanmar established the broadly representative independent Advisory Commission on Rakhine State and agreed to its terms of reference. The Commission has already started its work. The Myanmar Government is actively implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission.

Both Myanmar and Bangladesh are friendly neighbours of China. China has always actively engaged with both countries to find a solution to the Rakhine issue through bilateral dialogue and consultations between the two countries. In late June, State Counsellor and Foreign Minister of China Mr. Wang Yi held an informal meeting with the visiting Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Mr. Ali, and the Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Mr. U Kyaw Tint Swe. On the basis of the three-phase solution proposed by China last year — comprising a cessation of hostilities, repatriation and development — they reached a four-point principled common understanding on the proper settlement of the Rakhine issue.

First, efforts should be continued in line with the three-phase proposal of cessation of hostilities, repatriation and development towards a rapid improvement of the situation in Rakhine state. On that basis, Myanmar and Bangladesh should find a proper solution through bilateral consultations. That would serve the fundamental interests of both countries and is conducive to regional peace and stability.

Secondly, the most pressing task is to address the repatriation of those who fled to Bangladesh. The two countries should adopt effective measures as soon as possible and take substantive steps to repatriate the first group of people.

Thirdly, in accordance with the will of both countries, China stands ready to provide further assistance to improve the living and housing conditions of those fleeing the conflict, including by providing emergency supplies and building the necessary infrastructure.

Fourthly, each side should leverage their respective advantages and strengthen development cooperation in the border areas of the two countries for the well-being of those on the ground. China is now working closely with Myanmar and Bangladesh on implementing the principled common understanding. Ambassador Sun Guoxiang, Special Envoy for Asian Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, made several visits to Myanmar and Bangladesh and, through an in-depth dialogue on the issue, promoted mutual trust between the two sides and called for resolving the issue through bilateral channels. Mr. Sun Guoxiang also briefed members of the Security Council and the Secretariat on his mediation efforts in New York (see S/2018/726).

China supports the work of Special Envoy Burgener, who visited China at the end of June at its invitation and held a frank dialogue with China on resolving the Rakhine issue. China has provided humanitarian material assistance to both Myanmar and Bangladesh to help to improve the living conditions of the displaced people.

The Rakhine issue has complex historical, ethnic and religious contexts. Resolving it requires long-term efforts through a gradual and persistent approach. Given the current situation, the international community should cherish the hard-earned progress, fully understand the great difficulties faced by the countries concerned and continue to provide constructive assistance instead of simply pressuring them. The Rakhine issue should be properly addressed by Myanmar and Bangladesh through bilateral channels. The two countries should continue to resolve developing issues as a result of implementing the repatriation agreement through dialogue. The priority is to start the repatriation process as soon as possible as a first step forward. There should not be any preconditions. Issues such as freedom of movement and citizenship should be resolved gradually during the repatriation process.

UNHCR and UNDP should enhance consultation with the Myanmar Government, overcome technical difficulties, avoid politicization and implement in earnest the tripartite memorandum of understanding. The international community should pay greater attention and help local communities to eradicate poverty in order to promote sustainable development, improve livelihoods and economic and social conditions, and achieve stability and harmonious coexistence among all ethnic groups. That is the fundamental way to resolve issues over the long-term.

China commends UNDP and the World Bank for their efforts to promote local development. We hope that the international community will continue its contribution to the development of Myanmar and Bangladesh. Council members should remain unified. United Nations entities should play their respective roles and improve consultation with Myanmar, Bangladesh and other countries of the region. The international community should remain patient, promote dialogue between Myanmar and Bangladesh, help resolve practical issues and realize long-term peace and stability in Rakhine state.

**Mrs. Haley** (United States of America): Sir, I welcome you back to New York. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General Gettu. I also thank Ms. Blanchett for using the power of her voice at a time when the Rohingya have too few voices to fight for them. We thank her for being here.

One year ago this week, unspeakable violence was reaching its peak in Burma. A brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing was under way — one that ultimately resulted in more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees being exiled to camps in Bangladesh. Now, thanks to the support of the United States Department of State, we have an official account of what the refugees witnessed and what they suffered before they were driven from their homes. The results are consistent with the recently released report of the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (A/HRC/39/64). The world can no longer avoid the difficult truth of what happened in Burma. Let me warn everyone listening that the details of the crimes the Rohingya suffered in Burma are stomach-churning, difficult to hear and even more difficult to say. But the facts of the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya must be said and heard.

The State Department report is eye-opening, even for those of us who have a good understanding of what has occurred in Burma over the past two years. It is based on interviews with 1,024 Rohingya refugees in camps throughout the Cox's Bazar refugee camp. The interviews were conducted by a team of experienced international human rights investigators and the refugees interviewed were randomly selected. In short, the methodology of the report is sound and its conclusions are shocking. The first-hand accounts of the survivors reveal that the majority of the Rohingya directly experienced violence, either to their homes, families or both. Most importantly, the report identifies one group — the Burmese military and security forces — as the perpetrator of the overwhelming majority of the crimes. The numbers tell just part of the story.

Eighty-two per cent of the refugees saw a killing; 82 per cent saw their homes or villages destroyed; 65 per cent witnessed an abduction, arrest or detention of a fellow Rohingya; 64 per cent watched a family member or fellow villager be injured and half of the Rohingya refugees — 51 per cent — said they witnessed sexual violence. I repeat — 51 per cent. Forty-five per cent specifically witnessed a rape and, behind the numbers, there are stories of almost unbelievable brutality. In some areas perpetrators used tactics that resulted in mass casualties, for example locking people in houses to burn them, fencing off entire villages before shooting into the crowd or sinking boats full of hundreds of fleeing Rohingya. Rohingya men, women and children were mutilated, dismembered, decapitated and burned

alive. Infants and children were not spared. Multiple witnesses saw soldiers throwing infants and small children into fires and burning huts, rivers and village wells. The very young, the very old and the sick who could not escape the attacks were burned inside their huts. The military and police went from house to house looking for girls and women. When they found them, they did not bother to hide what they were after. Women and girls were raped in the open, in public. Fully one fifth of all Rohingya who survived witnessed more than 100 victims being killed or injured. Let me repeat that — 20 per cent of the randomly selected survivors of the violence saw a mass-casualty event.

The United States, the United Kingdom, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Peru and others have worked to keep the Security Council's focus on the atrocities in Burma. We have worked to hold the Burmese security forces accountable. Many of us have heard at first hand the accounts of victims. We have seen the sprawling refugee camps and the bulldozed areas where villages once stood. We have seen where innocent human beings were raped, murdered and burned alive for no other reason than their religious and ethnic identity.

Some have stood up to help ease the suffering and provide accountability to Burma. The United States recognizes the generosity of the Government and the people of Bangladesh. They have fed and sheltered nearly 1 million desperate people. Their generosity has saved countless lives. The United States is the largest provider of humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya crisis. We also recognize others who have given generously.

Beyond our humanitarian efforts are important efforts to demand accountability. In June, the European Union and Canada sanctioned seven Burmese military officers for their roles in the violence. Earlier this month, the United States Department of the Treasury sanctioned five Burmese military and border-guard commanders and two units of the Burmese army for their involvement in the ethnic cleansing and other human rights abuses. However, much more must be done. The United Nations must have full and unimpeded access to Burma to deliver humanitarian aid and development assistance. The media must have access to the country, including Rakhine state. A free and responsible press is critical for all democracies. We expect to see Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, two Reuters journalists facing trial for reporting the violence against the Rohingya, acquitted of all charges when a Burmese court renders its verdict next week.

The difficult path to democracy must continue in Burma and culminate in a military that is subordinate to the civilian Government, not the other way around. Here at the Security Council, we must hold those responsible for violence to account. A responsive, democratic Government that respects the rights of its minorities will not emerge in Burma until the Government demonstrates that it is committed to accountability. We will continue to suffer the shame that our predecessors suffered after Rwanda and Srebrenica if we do not act when the Burmese Government falls short.

In one of his final acts of service, Kofi Annan led the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which investigated the causes of the crisis in Burma. The Commission recommended equal rights for all Burmese citizens. It called for all Burmese to have opportunity to feed their families. It called for all people of Burma to enjoy freedom of movement and have equal access to justice under the law. The implementation of those recommendations would advance the dignity and security of all Burmese. Until then, none of us — members of the Security Council, the Burmese military, civilian leaders or other world leaders — has the excuse of ignorance. We are now all armed with the devastating eye-witness accounts of the Rohingya, which lead us to the following conclusions.

Children, babies, women and men suffered unspeakable crimes. The attacks were planned, premeditated and coordinated. The perpetrator was the Burmese military and security forces. The whole world is watching what we will do next, and whether we will act.

**Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren** (Netherlands): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this very important meeting today. Let me start by thanking the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Goodwill Ambassador, Ms. Blanchett, and the Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Mr. Gettu, for their strong briefings.

This week marks one year since the report of the Annan Advisory Commission on Rakhine State was issued. Last week, we mourned the passing of Mr. Kofi Annan in the Security Council, and we remembered his legacy. Today, we should honour his legacy by encouraging Myanmar to implement all the

recommendations of the Annan Commission in full. There is no greater tribute than the implementation of the pathway that Mr. Kofi Annan, who cared deeply about Myanmar, provided us for an inclusive future in Rakhine state.

It provided hope for a solution to the complex challenges of Rakhine state — hope that was destroyed by the terrorist attack by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and the violent response of Myanmar's security forces. They were meant to protect the Rohingya. Instead, they violently chased more than 700,000 women, men and children from their homes to neighbouring Bangladesh, where the Government and people have opened their homes and land to those in need.

One year later, virtually none of the Rohingya refugees has felt safe to return. That has become one of the largest humanitarian crises of the twenty-first century. It is in that sobering reality that we meet today. I will reflect on the following: first, the urgent need for accountability; secondly, the return of the Rohingya people to Myanmar; and thirdly, the Security Council's further engagement.

First, I will speak on accountability. In Kutupalong camp last April, the Council saw the devastating effects of the crisis. I will never forget the large number of persons who had been physically and psychologically wounded. Small children had deep scars on their heads and limbs. They did not play. They did not dream. We met a woman holding a 16-day-old baby. She did not know how to bond with the child. She did not know who the father was. She was raped by Myanmar soldiers on the night her husband was murdered. That was not an isolated incident; sexual violence perpetrated against Rohingya women and girls was used to instil fear in the Rohingya to force them to flee. The effects of those horrendous crimes will last for generations.

Justice is not only a means to ensure that the Rohingya feel safe enough to return voluntarily to their homes in Rakhine state. Ensuring accountability is an end in and of itself. The report of the Human Rights Council Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (A/HRC/39/64) highlights the need to prosecute crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide and to hold those responsible to account. The shocking findings of the Fact-Finding Mission's report need follow-up and should be included in legal procedures to establish accountability.

The Myanmar authorities announced the formation of a commission of inquiry. While we are encouraged that Myanmar is taking a step towards justice, intentions are meaningful only when followed by concrete steps towards full accountability. It is up to the Myanmar Government to show that it meets those standards. If there is no progress at the national level, the international community has to take responsibility and provide alternatives, and then the Council needs to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court. There can be no impunity.

Secondly, I will address the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingya people to Rakhine state. The memorandum of understanding signed by Myanmar, UNHCR and UNDP was a first step in the right direction, but we have serious concerns about its implementation. If Myanmar is serious about its willingness to let refugees return safely, the best way to show that is by allowing the United Nations unfettered access to northern Rakhine to assist and fulfil its mandate; by addressing the issue of severely restricted freedom of movement for the Rohingya people in Rakhine state; by making sure that internally displaced persons can return to their places of origin; and by offering a credible path to citizenship for those who are entitled to it by law.

Thirdly, I will focus on the Council's engagement. It was in response to a letter from the Secretary-General that the Council decided to give that human tragedy the attention it deserves. We thank the Secretary-General for his leadership and commitment to the Rohingya people from day one. The Council has constructively engaged with the Myanmar authorities both during and following its visit. We have to conclude, however, that this approach has yielded minimal results. I hear a call for patience, but time is pressing.

The international community cannot rely on the generous hospitality of Bangladesh forever. New realities on the ground make it more difficult for people to return to their homes or places of origin. Traces — essential to truth-finding and accountability — are erased. The role of the press is crucial in that regard, as a free press serves the governed instead of the Government. We therefore call for the immediate release of the two Reuters journalists. The Myanmar Government needs to pick up the pace. It needs to create an environment conducive to return and to sustainable peace, as well as ensure accountability. We expect results.

The Security Council will have to continue its engagement, working side by side with other United Nations efforts, including those of the Special Envoy, the Human Rights Council and its Fact-Finding Mission, and funds and programmes to move the situation towards progress. All of us, and Myanmar above all, need to work without delay, using all tools at our disposal, to achieve the same objective — a democratic Myanmar in which all ethnic, minority and religious groups, including the Rohingya, can live together peacefully throughout the territory.

**Mr. Meza-Cuadra** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting and the important briefings delivered by Secretary-General António Guterres, Ms. Cate Blanchett in her capacity as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Goodwill Ambassador and Mr. Gettu, Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Peru remains attentive to and deeply concerned over the situation of the Muslim Rohingya population in Rakhine state in Myanmar, as well as the largest refugee camp in the world, established in Cox's Bazar thanks to the solidarity of the Government of Bangladesh, which already hosts more than 900,000 people.

A year has passed since the indiscriminate acts of violence that triggered the mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of people, and it has been four months since the members of the Security Council saw in situ the gravity of the humanitarian situation, the vulnerability of the population and the horror of the atrocities denounced. Peru had the honour of leading the visit of the members of the Council, together with the United Kingdom and Kuwait.

However, we must recognize that the responses that have been made remain insufficient to sustainably resolve the crisis, despite the efforts made by the international community and the initiative of the Secretary-General, who brought the matter to the attention of the Council, exercising, for the first time since 1986, the prerogatives conferred to him by the Charter of the United Nations, as my colleague from the Netherlands mentioned. That is why we must pool our efforts to achieve the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of the Muslim Rohingya people.

The agreements signed by Myanmar, Bangladesh, UNHCR and UNDP and the establishment of a Special Envoy's office in Naypyidaw were steps in the right direction, as is the establishment of the national commission of inquiry. Those arrangements must be translated into results on the ground in terms of access to justice and returnees. We welcome recent meetings aimed at promoting livelihoods and the provision of basic services for returnees. However, we emphasize the urgency of fully implementing the recommendations of the Kofi Annan Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. We take this opportunity to join in the tributes to the former Secretary-General and highlight the validity of his legacy.

We stress the need to address the root causes of the conflict in Rakhine state and the marginalization of Rohingya Muslims as soon as possible, which entails their recognition as citizens and the full exercise of their fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of movement, dispelling dehumanizing narratives and overturning discriminatory regulations. It is essential to restore the trust of the Rohingya population by encouraging dialogue among all stakeholders, including the affected population and neighbouring countries, with the support and assistance of the United Nations and the Security Council.

We believe that it is imperative to deploy on the ground mechanisms capable of coordinating and ensuring the short- and long-term conditions required for the return of refugees and, consequently, building sustainable peace. The Myanmar-Bangladesh ministerial meeting held on 10 August is an encouraging sign. We also believe that a transparent, independent and comprehensive accountability process, with jurisdiction over all human rights violations, is essential. Peru is carefully studying the recent report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/39/64), including its specific recommendations. The atrocities that were committed cannot go unpunished.

Lastly, it is urgent to allow access to northern Rakhine state to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and all independent international actors who can advocate for the forgotten victims — as the Secretary-General called them — so that they have access to justice and so as to ensure the guarantees necessary for the safe return of refugees and displaced persons.

**Mr. Ipo** (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire congratulates you, Mr. Minister, on your country's outstanding leadership of the work of the

Security Council, and thanks the British delegation for organizing this important meeting dedicated to the situation in Myanmar. My delegation also thanks Secretary-General António Guterres for his detailed briefing on the situation of the Rohingya people in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Lastly, we thank Under-Secretary-General Tegegnework Gettu, Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, and Ms. Cate Blanchett, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador, for their excellent briefings.

One year since the beginning of the crisis on 25 August 2017, which led to the large-scale displacement of populations, the majority of whom were women and children, the situation in Myanmar — especially with regard to issues concerning Rohingya displaced persons, refugees and human rights in Rakhine state — continues to draw the attention of the international community. Despite the progress made since the Security Council's mission to Myanmar and Bangladesh from 28 April to 1 May, enormous challenges remain with regard to the conditions necessary for the return of Rohingya refugees to their homes and to the complex humanitarian and human rights situation. Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced of the need to work collectively to find a lasting and viable solution to the crisis so as to end the tragedy that the Rohingya populations in Bangladesh and Myanmar are enduring daily.

Moreover, it is important to stress that no lasting solution to this crisis situation will be possible without Myanmar's full involvement. My delegation therefore welcomes the commitment of the Government of Myanmar to working henceforth with the United Nations within the framework of the tripartite memorandum of understanding signed on 6 June, with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme, and in close cooperation with Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar. In that regard, my country encourages the Myanmar authorities to work harder towards the re-establishment of trust, which will be the determining factor in ensuring the effective, voluntary return of the Rohingya refugees in safe, dignified and sustainable conditions to their places of origin or to a location of their choice, in accordance with presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, issued on 6 November 2017. Furthermore, as part of the fulfilment of that commitment, it would be fitting for the Government of Myanmar to consider options to facilitate wider access to the relevant United Nations agencies and their partners, in particular in Rakhine state, so as to enable them to provide humanitarian assistance to those populations in need.

Côte d'Ivoire continues to believe that genuine and sustained cooperation between Bangladesh and Myanmar will contribute effectively to resolving the crisis. In that regard, my country welcomes the signing of an agreement on 10 August between the two countries concerning, inter alia, the repatriation of refugees and the establishment of a direct telephone line linking their Foreign Ministers. My delegation hopes that that new agreement, which is in keeping with the spirit of the bilateral agreement of 23 November 2017, will allow for the voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of the Rohingya refugees. My country also believes that a lasting solution to the crisis depends on the artful management of its root causes. To that end, Côte d'Ivoire encourages Myanmar to take bold steps to find solutions to core problems.

The issue of the return of the Rohingya displaced persons and refugees also brings to the fore the problem of social cohesion, which must be restored among the various communities living in Myanmar, in particular in Rakhine state. The role of civil society could be decisive to that end. My delegation therefore welcomes the initiative of religious leaders to assume a role with regard to that issue, and supports their work to promote peace and reconciliation within their country's communities. Moreover, my delegation believes that concrete measures should be taken, based on the inclusive economic and social development of Rakhine state, to ensure a decent and sustainable future for refugees and displaced persons, which would encourage their voluntary return. That was the gist of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by the late former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, whose memory we once again honour. The Commission recommended solutions pertaining to the economic development of Rakhine state with a view to ensuring peace and security in the country and to improving the living conditions of all segments of its population.

Undeniably, the fight against impunity is a priority issue with regard to managing the crisis. As the Secretary-General rightly mentioned during his visit to Bangladesh refugee camps on 2 July, the Rohingya refugees are demanding justice with respect to a

situation that is probably "one of the most tragic stories in relation to the systematic violation of human rights".

The information contained in the report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/39/64), released on 27 August, which sheds light on blatant human rights violations committed by the army and other security forces of Myanmar, is a source of serious concern for the Council. My delegation therefore urges the Government of Myanmar to take urgent measures to ensure that those responsible for human rights violations, in particular those involving women and children, are held accountable. In that regard, the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry to assign responsibility for alleged human rights violations should help meet the challenge of accountability.

In conclusion, I would be remiss were I not to point out the importance of adopting a regional approach to settling this crisis, which remains essential to maintaining peace and security in that part of the world. In that regard, my delegation commends the leadership of the Chinese Government and pays tribute to the Government and the people of Bangladesh for their great generosity. Côte d'Ivoire also calls on the donor community and all relevant actors to provide special support, following the example of the World Bank, for Bangladesh, which, in its 20 July letter to the Security Council, drew the attention of the international community to the possible damage to security that could result from the continued presence of Rohingya refugees within its territory.

Côte d'Ivoire once again calls on the international community to firmly commit to supporting Myanmar in its quest for peace and stability, as well as in its reconstruction efforts.

**Ms. Wronecka** (Poland): I would like to thank the Secretary-General and Mr. Tegegnework Gettu for their detailed briefings and remarks. I also welcome to the Council and thank Ms. Cate Blanchett, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador, for her invaluable remarks.

It has been a year since the most recent outbreak of violence in Rakhine state in Myanmar, which forced more than 700,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. We remain deeply worried about the humanitarian situation, especially in Rakhine state, where hundreds of thousands of people are waiting for our assistance. Every day lost to bureaucratic deliberations means that we are collectively responsible for human lives that are perishing.

As we welcome the signing of the memorandum of understanding among Myanmar, the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on assisting in the repatriation and resettlement process, we also urge its full implementation and hope that the Myanmarese authorities will fully cooperate with United Nations agencies. We acknowledge the information about the Myanmarese authorities' granting of access to 23 villages and hope that UNHCR teams will have unlimited and independent access to those pilot project sites.

We continuously urge the Government of Myanmar to step up its efforts to create sustainable conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Rohingya refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes. We believe that significant steps from the decision-makers in Naypyidaw are needed, as progress on the ground is insufficient. Therefore, we are pleased to hear that further contacts between the relevant ministries of Bangladesh and Myanmar are being established to discuss the implementation of the bilateral agreement signed in November 2017.

We are deeply concerned about the findings of the report (A/HRC/39/64) of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, which was published yesterday, in particular with regard to violations that might amount to crimes under international law. In that context, let us underline that, in order to stop the recurrence of violence, the issue of impunity and accountability for those crimes needs to be addressed. We call upon the Government in Naypyidaw to cooperate with the Fact-Finding Mission, including by granting access to the country. We furthermore acknowledge the formation of the independent commission of inquiry by the Myanmarese authorities and hope that it will commence a transparent and unbiased investigation of all cases of human rights violations.

I believe that there could not be a better way to commemorate Mr. Kofi Annan than to fully concentrate on the implementation of the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission, which he chaired, in order to address the root causes of the crisis.

Before I conclude I would like to underline that we are not forgetting that Myanmar is a developing country

with a fragile economy that is prone to natural disasters. A comprehensive approach focused on building the resilience of its society and supporting the State's internal capabilities needs to be further developed. We are aware that rebuilding Rakhine and healing the local communities will be a long process. The international community, after delivering immediate humanitarian aid, should focus on developing a long-term strategy to assist Myanmar in rebuilding and developing Rakhine state and other parts of the country that will require international assistance.

**Mr. Umarov** (Kazakhstan): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the update on the latest developments in Myanmar and the plight of Rohingya refugees who fled from Rakhine state to Bangladesh exactly one year ago. We are grateful to Cate Blanchett, Goodwill Ambassador of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for her emotional briefing. We hope that her coming onboard will pave the way for progress towards reconciliation and sustainable peace. We also thank Associate Administrator Gettu for his valuable contribution to the discussion today.

As fate would have it, it is just one year ago that the Rakhine Advisory Commission, led by the late former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, submitted its recommendations. We pay tribute to Mr. Annan and express our sincere hope that the Government of Myanmar will implement all 88 of the Commission's recommendations to bring lasting peace, security and prosperity to Myanmar, including in Rakhine state.

Exactly a year ago, the international community witnessed one of the largest humanitarian and human rights catastrophes, with displacement amounting to the more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees who have fled into Bangladesh since the 25 August 2017 attack against Myanmar security forces, which sparked the current crisis. The report (A/HRC/39/64) of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar gives a full accounting of the status quo.

What is most striking is that 60 per cent of the Rohingya refugees are children who were forced to leave their homes and, as the Security Council members saw for themselves in April in Cox's Bazaar, have had to stay in refugee camps in extremely difficult conditions. Kazakhstan commends the efforts of the United Nations and all humanitarian partners for helping the Rohingya refugees by providing food, shelter, health care and water, among other means of support.

We note some positive measures taken by the Government of Myanmar. We are particularly encouraged by the recent ministerial meeting in Naypyidaw between Myanmar and Bangladesh. The agreement on the speedy repatriation of displaced refugees from Cox's Bazar back to Rakhine and the establishment of a hotline at the ministerial level bode well for some constructive outcomes.

Kazakhstan welcomes the memorandum of understanding signed between the Government of Myanmar and UNHCR and UNDP in June 2018. We hope that United Nations funds and programmes will henceforth have unfettered and safe access to all the areas of Rakhine in order to render emergency assistance. This is the much-awaited access needed to alleviate the present human suffering.

The recently established independent commission of inquiry could be considered one of the key steps towards reconciliation and transitional justice. At the same time, my delegation believes that including a reputable representative of the Muslim community in the commission would have greatly increased its credibility and helped to build bridges.

Kazakhstan welcomes the opening of the office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, in Naypyidaw. We are confident that the positive engagement of the Myanmar authorities with the Special Envoy will further strengthen the cooperation of the Government of Myanmar with the United Nations .

At the same time, there can be no durable and lasting solution for the Rohingya issue without addressing the root causes of the crisis. Key among them are those related to the citizenship and restoration of the rights and freedom of the Rohingyas, poverty alleviation and development. We are still observing severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, as well as restricted access to education, health care and sources of livelihoods for those whom remain in Rakhine state, even today as we speak. It is obvious that only when the Rohingya refugees enjoy security, see tangible progress in the aforementioned areas and witness justice being served with respect to those who have suffered outrageous acts of violence will they start returning to the region.

Although, we completely understand that intercommunal trust cannot be restored overnight, and that it will be a long-running and challenging process, United Nations agencies could be of help if provided the access and conditions necessary for work. Such negotiations, if they are to be successful, demand the active participation of all stakeholders. The delegation of Kazakhstan therefore urges the Government of Myanmar to address all the related issues in depth and make every effort to eliminate the root causes, with the help of the international community. Given the complexity and long-lasting effects of the humanitarian crises in Rakhine state, we appeal to all Member States, international organizations and other actors to continue providing their support and assistance to Bangladesh and Myanmar to overcome the crisis.

We should work patiently and diligently with both sides, as well as other stakeholders, to achieve a tangible result.The Security Council should not only continue to be seized of the situation of the Rohingyas, but also see that it is resolved satisfactorily. My delegation of Kazakhstan is committed to supporting all aspects of multilateral action to find a sustainable solution to the plight of the Rohingya refugees.

**Ms. Guadey** (Ethiopia): We thank the United Kingdom for organizing this meeting, and we are pleased to see you, Mr. President, presiding over it. I would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for being here with us this afternoon and for his briefing on the security and humanitarian situation in Myanmar. We also welcome United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Associate Administrator Tegegnework Gettu and the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Goodwill Ambassador Cate Blanchett, and we appreciate their useful briefings.

It is evident that efforts have been undertaken by the Government of Myanmar to try to address the situation in Rakhine state following the visit of the Security Council and the follow-up engagements. Certainly, more needs to be done with regard to the humanitarian situation, accountability measures on alleged human right violations and implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, as well as in many other areas, to bring lasting peace and reconciliation to Myanmar.

The memorandum of understanding signed by the Government of Myanmar and two United Nations agencies, UNHCR and UNDP, on 6 June, is a step in the right direction that we hope will facilitate conditions for the safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified repatriation of refugees. It is indeed vital to ensure the swift and full implementation of that agreement.

The Council's visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh last May provided the opportunity to witness the condition of the refugee camps, which continues to be a matter of serious concern. Therefore, we underline the need to address the worsening humanitarian situation and the suffering of those who have fled, particularly women and children.

Despite the devastating humanitarian situation, the efforts undertaken by the Government of Bangladesh to provide safety and humanitarian assistance to refugees are highly commendable. However, the magnitude and scale of devastation necessitate further financial and logistical support to Bangladesh, the United Nations and the other humanitarian partners that are engaged in this effort.

Of course, the complex challenges that Rakhine state is facing need a political solution, which requires a comprehensive strategy aimed at addressing the root causes of the crisis through reconciliation, peace, stability and development. In that vein, the rapid and effective implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission remains absolutely vital.

We underscore the need for a transparent and independent investigation mechanism to ensure accountability for the alleged human right violations. To that end, we note the initiative undertaken by the Government of Myanmar to establish an independent commission of inquiry that also comprises international personalities. In that regard, we stress the need to expedite the process in order to ensure reconciliation, peace and stability in Rakhine state.

The bilateral engagement between Bangladesh and Myanmar remains very important to ensuring the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. It is in that context that we took positive note of the recent Myanmar-Bangladesh ministerial meeting, held on 10 August. We encourage both Governments to expedite the implementation of the agreed memorandum of understanding.

It is also important that the Council continue to maintain its unity and enhance its cooperation with the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh, as well as regional and subregional organizations in addressing

the situation. We support and encourage the Special Envoy's engagement with the Government of Myanmar and other relevant stakeholders, which aims to build confidence and mutual trust to pave the way for greater cooperation in resolving the situation in Rakhine state.

**Mr. Alotaibi** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting, and we welcome the fact that you are presiding it.

We express our deep appreciation for the presence of Secretary-General António Guterres and for his valuable briefing. His presence today is a clear indication of what this humanitarian issue means to him, Security Council members and the international community as a whole. We highly value his tremendous efforts pertaining to the crisis of the Rohingya minority refugees, and we emphasize our full support for his noble endeavours.

I would also like to thank Mr. Gettu of the United Nations Development Programme and Ms. Cate Blanchett, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Goodwill Ambassador, for their valuable briefings.

August marks one year since the start of violence in Rakhine state in Myanmar. That violence has led to the displacement of more than 800,000 people of the Rohingya minority to Bangladesh, according to statistics published by UNHCR, bringing the total number of Rohingya refugees in the biggest refugee camps in the world to 1.1 million.

Today's meeting comes one day after the issuance of the report (A/HRC/39/64) of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, which documented crimes that amount to genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Myanmar. The report confirms the conclusions reached by many international organizations regarding those crimes, and is consistent with what we witnessed during Security Council visits to Rakhine and what we heard from eyewitnesses to those crimes during our meetings with Rohingya refugees in the camps of Cox's Bazar.

The world is following the proceedings of our Security Council meeting today and expects nothing less from us than to maintain our moral and humanitarian stance and to rise above all political considerations in dealing with one of the worst catastrophes in modern history — a catastrophe that the Rohingya minority, subjected to killings and torture, are still suffering as a result of their oppression and forced displacement. Such events can only be described as ethnic cleansing, aimed at erasing their culture and wiping out their identity.

Since the Security Council visit to Bangladesh and Myanmar in April, we note some of the initial steps taken by the Government of Myanmar towards resolving the humanitarian crisis. Meetings among officials in both Bangladesh and Myanmar, the signing of a memorandum of understanding and the establishment of a body to investigate violations of human rights are all good, albeit limited steps, the majority of which are yet to be implemented on the ground.

The demands identified by the Security Council in its presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22) and the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by Kofi Annan, are clear and concrete, aimed at resolving the root causes of the crisis, ending the suffering of the refugees and ensuring their voluntary return in a peaceful and dignified manner to their original homes in Myanmar. Such a voluntary return cannot begin without taking a series of confidence-building measures to ensure a safe return and dignified life in Rakhine state.

I recall some of the measures that should be taken prior to the voluntary return of refugees: undertaking an independent and transparent investigation into the crimes and other transgressions committed against the Rohingya minority in Rakhine state; the Government of Myanmar's taking all measures to guarantee the immediate cessation of violence and ethnic discrimination and to ban the excessive use of force in violation of the rights of civilians in Rakhine state; closing all internally displaced persons camps; the Government of Myanmar's taking all the necessary measures against incitement of violence and hatred in order to ensure peace and harmony among all communities, under the rule of law; granting permission for all United Nations agencies and other partners to freely enter Rakhine state and ensure their freedom of movement safely and without impediments; the elimination of all root causes of the crisis of the Rohingya minority, without discrimination and regardless of ethnicity or religion, while granting their inherent right to citizenship, as stressed in General Assembly resolution 70/233; and undertaking comprehensive social and economic reforms accompanied by eliminating the root causes of the crisis of the Rohingya refugees.

The humanitarian tragedy of the Rohingya refugees compels the international community to redouble its efforts towards alleviating their daily suffering. As we hold our meeting today, refugee camps are facing the challenges of monsoons, rains and floods, which have led to the collapse of some sites, due to hurricanes and mudslides.

In closing, paragraph 3 of Article 1, Chapter I of the Charter of the United Nations stresses the importance of achieving international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. There should be no discrimination between men and women. That is the Charter that we, the peoples of the world, have pledged to observe with a view to saving future generations from the scourge of war; the Charter that determines the course of future generations; the Charter that joins us in unity to face all issues threatening international peace and security; and the Charter that compels us to rise above our political differences for the sake of protecting the vulnerable and seeking final solution for their predicaments. Among those individuals are the refugees from Rakhine state with whom we met in Cox's Bazar and listened to their concerns and suffering. Those refugees implored us not to forget their demands after we left their camps.

**Mrs. Mele Colifa** (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his clear and detailed briefing. We also thank Mr. Tegegnework Gettu, Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, and Ms. Cate Blanchett, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador, for her valuable and moving presentation.

Following the mass exodus that occurred in August last year, in which more than 700,000 Rohingyas were forced to flee Myanmar to Bangladesh, my delegation has paid particular attention to the situation of the refugees from that minority ethnic group, who have remained in vulnerable conditions in Bangladesh community centres for a year. We commend the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh and its people, with the assistance of the United Nations, its partners and other non-governmental organizations, in providing security, shelter and humanitarian assistance to all individuals who have fled the violence, and we encourage them to continue doing so until those people can return voluntarily, safely and with dignity to their homes in Myanmar.

Within the framework of efforts to address the crisis, a working delegation comprised of Council members visited Bangladesh and Myanmar in April and May, where it visited specific locations and had the opportunity to talk with governmental and military authorities and officials at various levels. Subsequently, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, Ms. Burgener, travelled to the area in June and July, having visited Rakhine and held meetings with Myanmar authorities. As part of that sequence of visits, of particular note was the visit in early July of the delegation led by Secretary-General António Guterres, who arrived in Cox's Bazar and met with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

Equatorial Guinea commends the reception and assistance that the authorities of both countries and United Nations agencies gave to all the delegations to facilitate their work. However, we also share the various concerns about the situation of refugees in community centres, as well as the setbacks that have so far prevented a large-scale voluntary and safe return that is backed by a political settlement guaranteeing the rights of the Rohingyas in Myanmar. In that regard, we call on the Government of Myanmar to redouble its efforts to create conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Rohingya refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes in Rakhine.

Nonetheless, my delegation welcomes several aspects clarified in a letter dated 27 June, addressed to the President of the Council from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar, including: the implementation of the Mechanism of the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine, in order to provide humanitarian assistance to all communities in need and coordinate such assistance; the signing of a memorandum of understanding by the Government of Myanmar, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme on 6 June, paving the way not only for assistance at the various stages of return and resettlement in the repatriation process, but also for an improvement in humanitarian assistance and livelihood opportunities for returnees, as well as for all communities in Rakhine state; the Government's

declaration that it does not accept any violation of human rights and will take action against any perpetrator in accordance with the law, provided that the accusations are supported by sufficient evidence; and the public commitment of the Government of Myanmar to implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, as well as establishing a ministerial-level commission to implement the recommendations.

Finally, in view of those assertions, I would like to conclude by encouraging all members of the Council and the international community to continue their constructive role in creating the external conditions necessary to facilitate consultations and dialogue that can help the Myanmar Government to find a solution to this situation.

**Mrs. Cordova Soria** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing, and we take this opportunity to reaffirm our greatest support for his important work. We also appreciate the briefing delivered by the Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, Mr. Tegegnework Gettu, and thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador, Ms. Cate Blanchett.

One year after the acts of violence that occurred in Rakhine state, my delegation reiterates its condemnation of and deep concern for the aftermath that those events continue to generate, which has resulted in the displacement of nearly 900,000 Rohingya people to Bangladesh. Without doubt, those acts of violence cannot go unpunished; my delegation therefore reiterates that they must be duly investigated, and those responsible identified and brought to justice to answer for their actions before the appropriate courts. Impunity is unacceptable and runs counter to the main objective and work of achieving reconciliation in the country and in Rakhine state.

We highlight the creation of an independent commission of inquiry in late July to investigate all human rights violations committed since August 2017. We also highlight the efforts of the Government of Myanmar towards the commission's establishment, particularly the definition of its programme of work and the formation of a specialized secretariat to assist the commission therein. In that regard, we call on all agencies and institutions of the Government of Myanmar to collaborate with the commission's investigations, particularly in the collection of data and information and in obtaining testimonies. We hope that the work of the commission will be conducted under the principles of independence, impartiality, objectivity, transparency, integrity and professionalism.

Moreover, in order to prevent similar events from happening again, it is imperative that the Government of Myanmar focus on preventing hate speech, segregation and persecution from spreading; it must instead promote dialogue, mediation and negotiation to guarantee the security and physical integrity of all its inhabitants, without any racial, ethnic or religious distinction.

It is also important that the Government of Myanmar analyse the root causes of the crisis and fully comply with the recommendations made by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which provides a clear road map for the peaceful resolution of this sensitive situation, especially regarding the issue of citizenship, sustainable development of the Rohingya population and respect for the rights of that population. In the same vein, we must continue to work diligently and show greater progress in our efforts towards the dignified, informed and voluntary return of the refugees and internally displaced persons of Rakhine state. With that in mind, we highlight the establishment of a ministerial committee for that purpose and an advisory board to follow up on the activities carried out by the committee.

We welcome the coordination and technical work carried out by the Government of Myanmar, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme to implement the memorandum of understanding signed on 6 June. We also note that the agreed plan of work includes initiatives for promoting sustainable socioeconomic development, improving health services and education and creating conditions to strengthen peaceful coexistence among the communities of northern Rakhine state. We hope that the implementation of the memorandum of understanding will constitute an effective tool for resolving the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons.

We welcome the increased coordination and cooperation among humanitarian agencies and bodies for the deployment and provision of humanitarian assistance. In particular, we highlight the increase in activity from the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Food Programme and the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management. We note the willingness and openness shown by the Government of Myanmar to work with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to find the best ways to deal with the problems and challenges the country is facing. In that regard, we highlight the agreement to open an office of the Special Envoy in the city of Naypyidaw.

We are also concerned that, according to the operational update of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of 19 July, more than 11,000 people have continued to enter Bangladesh since the beginning of this year, escaping persecution and a lack of security. That is an issue that must be urgently addressed by the Government of Myanmar. However, urgent needs must also be addressed in Bangladesh, including assistance to mothers who have given birth in refugee camps; the need to improve food distribution and humanitarian assistance, while ensuring the receiving communities are impacted as little as possible; and access to water and sanitation to avoid an outbreak of diseases such as diphtheria, from which 8,000 people are suffering, according to the World Health Organization.

My delegation recognizes and commends the efforts that the Government of Bangladesh has been making over the past year regarding the refugees in its country. With that in mind, it is imperative that the international community and the United Nations do everything in their power to support the host communities in Bangladesh, particularly in the short term, taking into account that the monsoon season may have a devastating impact on the Rohingya population in the Cox's Bazar camps.

Finally, it is important to point out and reiterate that Bangladesh is not responsible for what happened in Myanmar. It has welcomed the Rohingya refugees selflessly and therefore needs the full support of the international community and incentives for its development in the short, medium and long term, since the unexpected influx of more than 900,000 refugees is significantly affecting Bangladesh's economy, politics and society. The Government and the people of Bangladesh should receive the full support of the United Nations, international funding bodies and subregional and regional actors and mechanisms to be able to continue its collaboration until the safe return of refugees and displaced persons can be guaranteed.

**The President**: I now give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

**Mr. Suan** (Myanmar): I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, for presiding over this important meeting and for the United Kingdom's successful presidency of the Security Council this month.

At the outset, please allow me to pay tribute to the late Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, who contributed tremendously towards our efforts to find lasting solutions to the problems that were jeopardizing peace and progress in Rakhine state. When he took on the responsibility of leading the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, at the request of State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, he wanted Myanmar to succeed and reach its goals of peace, prosperity, security and progress. The Commission's recommendations are welcomed by all as important steps for lasting peace and development in Rakhine state. The people of Myanmar will always be grateful for his invaluable support and wise counsel in the country's democratic transition. We should all learn from his way of solving conflicts in a peaceful manner with a constructive and caring approach.

Addressing the deep-rooted and complex issues in Rakhine state was a fundamental and crucial part of Myanmar Government's efforts in building peace and national reconciliation in the country. In May 2016, just two months after taking on State responsibility, the Government established the Central Committee for the Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development in Rakhine State. Soon after, on 5 September, the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, headed by Mr. Annan, was established. The Commission was mandated to examine the complex challenges facing Rakhine state and to propose responses to those challenges.

Barely a month later, on 9 October 2016, a religious extremist terrorist group called Aqa Mul Mujahidin, later known as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), launched its first attack on three border police posts in northern Rakhine state. The attack was premeditated and well organized, causing the deaths of 13 security personnel and other civilians. Their goal was clear — to incite violence and attract international attention of the issue at a time when the whole world was welcoming our peaceful democratic transition.

On 24 August 2017, the Rakhine Advisory Commission presented its final report to the Government of Myanmar. The 88 recommendations are aimed at

establishing lasting peace and stability in Rakhine state. The challenges are daunting, multi-faceted and require multitasking, but we welcomed the report and decided to carry on the task of implementing the recommendations in good faith to the fullest extent, within the shortest time frame possible, and consonant with the situation on the ground.

Then, in the early hours of 25 August 2017, just a few hours after Mr. Annan submitted his final report, ARSA launched premeditated, well-planned and coordinated simultaneous armed attacks on 30 border guard posts and one army battalion headquarters in northern Rakhine. The attacks caused the deaths of dozens of security personnel and many innocent civilians. ARSA has also brutally killed more than 250 non-Muslim ethnic minorities in northern Rakhine since October 2016. On the same day that ARSA attacked the security posts they massacred 100 Hindus, which was well documented. The ARSA attacks triggered a predictable and logical response from Myanmar security forces to protect the life and property of every citizen, resulting in the subsequent mass displacement of people. Those are plain facts and nothing but the truth, but they were conveniently discounted or ignored by mainstream media.

The violent attacks were not coincidence. ARSA terrorists and their foreign masterminds knew all too well that the Myanmar security forces would respond to their attacks with full force. They must also have anticipated the exodus of people from northern Rakhine to Bangladesh. Those events were well planned and executed with the support of foreign terrorist organizations.

The present grave humanitarian problems and the untold suffering of the innocent civilian people of all communities in Rakhine state were carefully calculated, instigated and created by ARSA. Their objective was to undermine the Myanmar Government's commitment and efforts to find lasting solution through the speedy implementation of the Commission's recommendations and to elicit maximum international pressure on Myanmar to achieve their political goals.

Our gathering here today could have been a different one had there been no terrorist attacks. It could have been a happier occasion of stock-taking on the implementation of the Rakhine Advisory Commission recommendations, or an international pledging conference to help with poverty alleviation and socioeconomic development on behalf of all communities in Rakhine. The provocative terrorist attacks of October 2016 and August 2017 have affected the course of our earnest endeavour to build a peaceful, fair and prosperous future for the people of Rakhine. But nothing shall stop our determination to continue our efforts to achieve our objectives.

We share deep sympathy and concern for all displaced persons, especially women and children. We believe that we will be able to solve the issue with our neighbour Bangladesh if we work together amicably in the spirit of good-neighbourliness. We have reached out to Bangladesh by sending ministerial delegations. We invited Bangladesh's Foreign Minister, Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, to Myanmar early this month. Among other things, during his visit the two sides agreed to deliver on the commitments made, to speed up the implementation of bilateral agreements on repatriation and to set up a hotline between the two countries at the ministerial level. In the course of the two months between November 2017 and January 2018, we signed three documents with Bangladesh to facilitate the repatriation of verified persons who crossed over to Bangladesh following the ARSA terrorist attacks in October 2016 and August 2017. According to the agreement on physical arrangements for repatriation, the process of repatriation was scheduled to have commenced on 23 January 2018.

In line with those bilateral agreements, Myanmar made arrangements with momentum for the repatriation of verified displaced persons. We have been ready to receive the first batch of verified returnees since 23 January. In February, Bangladesh provided us with a list of 8,032 people — without signatures, finger prints, proper photographs or, more important, the proper forms agreed by the two sides. Despite difficulties in verification owing to a lack of adequate information, we managed to verify 3,952 returnees as of 23 August 2018. We are also ready to receive those on a list of over 1,200 verified Hindus and Muslims that we shared with Bangladesh. But we have yet to receive a single returnee despite our repeated requests for their repatriation. We call on Bangladesh to fulfil its obligations in accordance with the bilateral agreements so as to allow without delay the return of verified persons who consented to return to Rakhine voluntarily.

Another important issue is the systematic repatriation of displaced persons staying on the border line. Since occupying the area 150 feet from

the international border line is unlawful, those people put themselves unwittingly in a situation that can affect the stability of the two bordering countries. It is highly possible that the areas could become an ARSA terrorist foothold. In that regard, we have requested the Bangladesh authorities not to provide them any assistance from their side of the border, instead we are now arranging to provide humanitarian assistance for them from the Myanmar side.

Moreover, the Government of Myanmar also signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to assist with speedy and efficient resettlement and rehabilitation of the returnees. We have already mapped out potential resettlement sites. On 7 August, United Nations officials were granted access to 23 villages in 13 village tracts selected for the first phase of the assessment programme. An additional three village tracts have been marked out for the resettlement of internally displaced persons residing near the border line. We urge the United Nations team to start the assessment programme as soon as possible.

The Government continues to implement the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission in earnest. Eighty-one out of the 88 recommendations have been implemented or are under implementation. In the process of implementation, the Government attaches great importance to the advice and opinion of the advisory board, chaired by Mr. Surakiart Sathirathai, former Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand. The advisory board submitted its final report on 16 August. The report contained balanced and viable final recommendations, which will certainly receive our serious attention.

We recognize the crucial role of the United Nations in addressing the issue of Rakhine, and the present humanitarian crisis in particular. Last April, we facilitated the visit by members of the Security Council, representatives of neighbouring countries and the Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. We welcomed the appointment of Ambassador Christine Schraner Burgener as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. We believe that we could maintain a constructive and fruitful relationship with the Special Envoy. We have facilitated the opening of her office in Naypyidaw.

Let me now turn to the question of accountability. The Government of Myanmar has made its position very clear that it will not condone any human rights abuses. Action will be taken against anyone if there is sufficient evidence. In that regard, the Government has established an independent commission of inquiry, led by Ambassador Rosario Manalo, an eminent diplomat with rich experience in the field of human rights. The Commission also includes Ambassador Kenzo Oshima, another prominent diplomat, and two highly respected members from Myanmar.

The Commission is tasked with investigating allegations of human rights violations and related issues following the terrorist attacks on 9 October 2016 and 25 August 2017, with a view to seeking accountability and reconciliation, as well as formulating recommendations on steps to be taken to ensure peace and stability in Rakhine state. The Commission will submit its report to the President of Myanmar within a year, including its recommendations prepared on the basis of the outcomes of its investigation.

In discharging its mandate, the Commission will apply in particular the 1950 Investigation Committee Act, which gives the Commission the necessary authority to investigate. The Commission will also avail itself of international human rights law and international humanitarian law where applicable. The Government of Myanmar will provide protection to all those who are in contact with the Commission, particularly victims and witnesses. The Commission will conduct its mandate while observing the principles of independence, impartiality and objectivity. The members met for the first time on 15 August. The Commission will commence its work this week.

With regard to the allegations of atrocity crimes committed by Myanmar security forces, as set out in the recent report (A/HCR/39/64) of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, I would like to reiterate that we did not accept the mandate of the Mission because we have concerns about its impartiality. Besides, I have serious doubts as to the intention behind the timing of the release of the report. The report, which was scheduled to be submitted only to the Human Rights Council on 18 September, was hastily released on the eve of this particular meeting of the Security Council. This action raises serious questions about the objectivity, impartiality and sincerity of the Fact-Finding Mission.

The challenges we are facing today in Rakhine state are formidable. However, the Government and people of Myanmar are united in our determination to achieve sustainable peace and development for all communities in Rakhine. We shall not let these challenges derail our ultimate goal of democratic nation-building. It will take time and patience to build trust and confidence among communities. We shall seek reconciliation but not retribution; compassion but not hatred; integration but not segregation.

While the primary responsibility to address the situation in Rakhine rests with the Government and people of Myanmar, the objective, positive and constructive contribution and support of the international community will be crucial to the success of Myanmar's national efforts. This is not the time to exploit the plight of innocent people, particularly women and children, from Rakhine for reasons of self-interest and political grandstanding. This is the time to act and to show our genuine concern by taking practical steps. Let the first batch of verified people who have expressed their interests in voluntary return go back to their land. Let the first phase of the assessment programme commence where access has been granted. Let us not waste our time.

In conclusion, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to all our friends who are helping us in various ways to resolve the challenges in Rakhine at this critical juncture of democratic transition. We should make important policy decisions based on facts and full understanding of the issues at hand. We should view this complex issue from a broader perspective.

We shall continue to work in good faith with the United Nations and with all our friends near and far to end the suffering of the people of Rakhine and rebuild their land so that all shall enjoy the fruits of peace and prosperity in a land blessed with so much resources and potential.

**The President**: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

**Mr. Bin Momen** (Bangladesh): We deeply appreciate the United Kingdom presidency's initiative to organize this open briefing on the situation in Myanmar. The United Kingdom's consistent lead on this issue in the Council has been a source of moral strength for the millions of Rohingya and others affected by this humanitarian crisis.

The eloquent testimonies we heard from the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador, Ms. Cate Blanchett leave nothing much to be added. Every passing week, there is new information emerging about the extent of the persecution and dehumanization the Rohingya had been subjected to, and about the possible ramifications of keeping the crisis unresolved for long.

We take a moment to express our gratitude to each one of the world leaders, United Nations representatives and personnel, representatives of the media, civil society and academia, and conscientious global citizens for their unstinting solidarity, support and advocacy for what has turned out to be one of the largest displacement crises in our world today.

"One year of crying. Now I am angry", read one of the banners carried by the Rohingya men, women and children who gathered at their camps in Cox's Bazar to mark the passage of one long, arduous year since they had been forcibly displaced from their homes across the border. Their grief and anger have many manifestations, and we have just heard some of their echoes in the Chamber. The Human Rights Council's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar released its report yesterday (A/HRC/39/64), and it is evident what caused such pervasive grief and anger among the forcibly displaced Rohingya. In no uncertain words, the Fact-finding Mission concludes that it was all caused in a premeditated and organized manner, and that the perpetrators had acted with a "genocidal intent". These findings largely echo those shared earlier by, among others, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Special Advisers of the Secretary-General on Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect, and a host of other independent entities.

With such conclusions at hand, the Security Council's custodianship of the issue remains all the more relevant and pressing. The Council has adopted presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22), visited the affected people in Bangladesh and Myanmar, and continued to engage with a host of actors, including the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Myanmar. Despite odds and obstacles, the Council has kept the issue alive and generally managed to speak in a unified voice in support of addressing the root causes of the crisis. As a party directly affected, Bangladesh recognizes the Council's efforts and calls for further calibrating

its response in light of the prevailing circumstances on the ground and the emerging evidence into the atrocity crimes committed against the Rohingya.

The five-point agenda presented by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to the General Assembly last year (see A/72/PV.14) essentially captures our expectations of the United Nations and the international community, and forms the basis of our engagements going forwards. A high-powered national task force continues to remain functional for overall policy orientation and coordination.

In the immediate aftermath of the crisis, we had to invest our resources and energy in a massive humanitarian response starting with immediate life-saving assistance. Thanks to the overwhelming support of our people and our many friends and partners from home and abroad, the humanitarian situation in the sprawling camps in Cox's Bazar has largely stabilized. It has been a relief for all concerned to have been able to avert the worst possible impact of the ongoing monsoon. There continues to be a small-scale influx of people from the other side of border, citing lack of access to food and security in northern Rakhine state.

It remains crucial for the forcibly displaced people and the much-stressed host communities to have the international community's enhanced and sustainable support for the United Nations response plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis. Pending their voluntary repatriation to Rakhine state, the Rohingya camped in Bangladesh need to have improved shelter, health care, livelihood and education options in the short to medium terms. Our authorities remain sensitized to some of the security and law and order issues in the camps, and continue to work with the Rohingya themselves to strengthen community-based interventions and safeguards. We urge continued vigilance and cooperation on the part of Member States of the region to help mitigate potential security risks, including those posed by transnational actors.

On the overriding priority of the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of the Rohingya, we have concluded enabling agreements and arrangements with Myanmar, and have already had a series of meetings of the joint working groups to identify and address some of the operational and technical challenges to implementing the agreed provisions. As far as Bangladesh is concerned, the initial steps towards repatriation have already been set in motion with the handing over of a short list of potential returnees to the Myanmar side in February. We are currently in the process of setting up transit infrastructure on our side, as envisaged in the agreements, and constituting a technical committee to oversee implementation in coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other relevant entities.

It must be made clear, however, that the return of the Rohingya cannot be begun unless the Rohingya themselves regain the trust and confidence to voluntarily opt for repatriation. The Secretary-General and several representatives have already spoken at length about the prerequisites on the ground for creating an environment conducive to their repatriation. It is well documented that the Rohingya would, at the minimum, seek guarantees for their safety and security, return to their homes and property, freedom of movement, livelihood opportunities, and a clear pathway to their legitimate demand for citizenship in Myanmar. It will be entirely up to the Myanmar authorities to build trust among the Rohingya about their sustainable return and peaceful coexistence with other communities in the Rakhine State.

During his visit to Myanmar earlier this month, our Foreign Minister noted the Myanmar leadership's commitment across the board to facilitating the Rohingya's return to Rakhine state. He was briefed by some on the measures being contemplated for the accommodation and livelihoods of the Rohingya, and visited the physical infrastructure built so far, with the support of some friendly countries of the region. He invited Myanmar to send a delegation to Bangladesh to brief the Rohingya first-hand about the arrangements being made, and to give them assurances about their safe and dignified return so that they can feel encouraged to voluntarily put their signatures and fingerprints on the agreed verification forms.

Meanwhile, as the Secretary-General and others have mentioned, the Myanmar authorities can consider a number of demonstrable measures that can evoke confidence about an enabling situation on the ground. These include, first, allowing unimpeded access to the United Nations Development Programme and UNHCR to all the affected villages and townships in Rakhine State for necessary humanitarian and development work, as reportedly envisaged in the memorandum of understanding concluded with Myanmar; secondly,

managing the safe and sustainable return of the Rohingya stranded along the border between Bangladesh and Myanmar and, pending their return, providing humanitarian assistance to them from the Myanmar side; thirdly, dismantling the camps for internally displaced persons in Rakhine state in a way that would allow the people confined therein to sustainably return to their homes or other places of choice, with their rights and freedoms restored; and fourthly, promoting reconciliation and trust among communities in Rakhine State, and curbing the malicious spread of hate speech and incitement to violence.

Most importantly, the question of accountability deserves to be addressed in the right earnest. The culture of impunity for the alleged crimes committed against the Rohingya must be brought to a close to heal their trauma and restore a sense of justice. The commission of inquiry formed by Myanmar recently should be allowed to act independently and factor in the observations made by the Fact-finding Mission. The international community, including the Council, has certain specific options and responsibilities outlined in the Mission's report, and should give them due consideration.

As a Member State committed to international criminal justice, and as a State party to the Rome Statute and other relevant international instruments, Bangladesh will continue to cooperate with various international processes and initiatives on the accountability issue. At the same time, Bangladesh stands ready to cooperate with Myanmar on any of its security concerns and other issues of strategic interest in the spirit of good-neighbourliness.

Over the past year, the international community has not allowed its concerns over the Rohingya humanitarian issue to run its course and die down. The Security Council could help sustain the momentum by adopting a much-anticipated resolution that would allow the issue to be featured on its regular agenda. The General Assembly, at the initiative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, adopted resolution 72/248, on the situation in Myanmar, last year; it needs to be updated this year, not least in the interest of continuing the mandate of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy. We look forward to Member States' principled support for these initiatives.

The outbreak of violence in northern Rakhine State coincided with the release of the groundbreaking report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, headed by Mr. Kofi Annan. With Mr. Annan's sad demise, the Rohingya have indeed lost one of their key allies and guardians — a voice that articulated their aspirations and charted a way forward in addressing the root causes of a complex situation. We must do justice to Mr. Annan's memory and contributions by lending our continued support to Myanmar in order to ensure the full, unconditional and non-selective implementation of all the recommendations he presented to the Myanmar leadership.

*The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.*